

Born to the Purple

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Born to the Purple

by [yungluv](#)

Summary

"Marriage between royals, Dream," she starts, wrinkles enunciated, "Is the birth of new monarchs."

Dream's stomach curls, his fingers mimicking as skin is pulled taut over his knuckles, fire-tainted veins exposed.

"You and George are soon to be the new royal family."

Or, an arranged marriage between polar opposite personalities leaves little room for the freedom that Dream so desperately longs for. Until it doesn't.

Notes

DISCLAIMER: I do not know anything about royal families or arranged marriage so I am making everything up. This is FICTION! Please do not mind if anything is inaccurate I'm just a poor American who knows nothing about monarchy. I sincerely apologize.

also follow me on twitter ;) @yungluvXD

Milk and Honey

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rock music. Loads of it. Pouring out of stupid, perfectly polished, marble walls. Mirroring the waterfall that slips cleanly out of the stupidly large fountain just outside. Pounding at crystal windows, webbing in emerald green leaves of elated berry bushes and fairytale trees. Maybe it's a bit ridiculous, to hate it all so much. Because obviously, (it slaps any passerby in the face,) Dream has everything anybody could ever want. Except.

Ooh, except.

The devilish and delicious exception of life at all. Because he's not really living, is he? Where's the danger, adventure, passion, love, life, trapped behind thick walls? Trapped in snotty, crisp suits and disgustingly posh dinner parties and the reprimands of his crown-plagued parents. Maybe it's ridiculous, to feel melancholy looking at it all. But it doesn't sound like freedom.

Someone shouts at him, as if they couldn't simply skip away under high ceilings to the far end of the house to escape the endless bass pounding at his walls. But nevertheless, scowl evident, he turns it down. He slowly places himself on the edge of his silk-smothered bed, jaw clenched, and his eyes set on the iridescent glass that stretches from head to toe of his wall. The way the light catches on the edges of the glass and pastel light pierces sharply at his eyes. Maybe he could hop through the window and land in a bush and maybe he could leave.

A dull knock draws his eyes away from the promise of a world beyond glass to the brooding door. He releases his set jaw and stands, smoothing his features over as he places himself just by the foot of the bed.

"Come in."

The door swings gently open, revealing a kind, mellow woman who does not in fact 'come in', instead stays behind the threshold, her petite shoulders framed by the doorway. Her skin is calm and fair, her irises wrapped in soft, rippling oceans and glowing. Her hair is stark against her skin, deep chestnut almost ebony. She folds her hands behind her back, face poised and placid. She speaks warmly and in a clean manner.

"Your father requested you dress well tonight," she relays, "And dinner will be earlier. He would like you to be down at five-thirty."

Dream frowns, raising his chin slightly. "What's the occasion?"

"He says he has news. That's all I know."

He nods, sending her the sincerest smile he can manage. It comes off strangled. "That's fine. Thank you, Cecille."

Without a word the door snaps shut and she disappears down the hallway. Dream's eyes find the clock and he sighs, reaching for the buttons of the dress shirt wrapped tightly around his skin, the collar suffocating.

He'd never been fond of family dinners, particularly because his relationship with his parents is quite a tense one. And you'd think that after having one nearly every night for the whole of his life

he would've gotten used to it by now. But each time he sits down before the row of taut faces and stern shoulders, he still feels as uncomfortable and strained as the previous night. When he's ordered to dress up, though, when his father has some sort of announcement, his nerves skyrocket.

The way it is, being the only son of two monarchs slipping toward their late years, Dream is essentially a business puppet. They can twirl him around, feed him to the elite as an offering, pour his glass full of demands. All because it grants them new opportunities, gets them to places they wouldn't be able to otherwise. And Dream, who takes their bullshit with a few snarky comments and lingering glares but nonetheless takes it, is granted a long list of rules to keep their image intact. And no matter how his father spins it, twist the words until they're in an unrecognizable knot, that's what they are. Rules.

Dream steps into the dwelling shadows of his closet, flicking the mockingly shimmering and dancing chandelier light on. He stares at the rows of cotton, velvet, satin, and leather shoulders on one wall, denim, corduroy, tweed, and suede pant legs on the other. There are sapphires, burnt oranges, Tiffany blues, magentas, scarlets and crimsons, endless jade greens. The far back wall is lined with a variety of shoes, all toes pointing menacingly at where Dream stands quiet in front of the doorway.

He dresses himself in a pair of cleanly shaped evergreen dress pants, soft blue hues mixed into the violent material. An ivory button-up is tucked into the waist, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. A curt pocket sits over his heart, and he stuffs a matching jade handkerchief into it. He wears shiny, jet-black dress shoes over bronze, argyle socks. A chunky silver watch is perched on his wrist, glittering and glistening and everything else.

The smooth soles of his shoes tap against tile, sending sharp snaps rumbling through the empty air, bouncing against clean walls and echoing back at him. He wanders through wide hallways with powder blue wallpaper. The ceilings hold swirling pastel brushstrokes, dancing flowers and smiling sunlight crafted skillfully from them. He emerges from the hallway into a happy balcony.

The room before him is one that owns towering walls, the air plentiful and stretching far as the ceiling reaches the sky. The wall holds a thick, heavy door, the crevices encrusted with gold detailing. Even the windows are lined with gold, twisting vines. The glass is spotless and almost entirely transparent. To each side of him is a curling staircase, the steps carved from lavish marble. The room feels far too vacant, the house ghostly.

He waltzes carefully down the steps, hand curled around an ebony railing. When he reaches the bottom, the faint sound of metal clashing begins to trickle into his ears, and as he stalks slowly past unlimited seating rooms and mahogany studies and quartz bathrooms the sound grows louder. When the kitchen presents itself before him, all shiny appliances and glittering floors and countertops, he peeks inside. A handful of chefs juggle bowls of simmering-something and litter chopped herbs and vegetables over vibrant dishes and wield polished knives.

Dream continues through the house, feeling entirely out of a horror movie as he passes silent room after silent room. He finally reaches the opening where the hallway fades into the dining room, made by a grand doorway. The doors it holds are propped open, the dents filled with a river of cyan acrylic.

Dream grits his teeth as he gazes emptily at the obnoxiously large table beyond the doors. He takes a step forward, past the doors and into the room.

The table is a long strip of mahogany, its legs curling and intertwining into intricate patterns. A narrow piece of fabric runs over the top, jade and decorated with an elaborate flourish pattern. Soft white lilies in crystal vases are placed on the table. Ivory, satin placemats sit below porcelain

dishes, their edges gilt, a neatly folded napkin placed on top. Golden utensils catch in the warm light from their position beside each plate. A Persian rug is splayed under the table and chairs, over hardwood. The room is made by sage, floral wallpaper that cave into another high ceiling, a crystal chandelier swinging happily from it. It should be beautiful, but to Dream it only appears sad, like a still-hopeful wilting flower.

He takes a seat beside his father, who sits at the head of the table, his mother across from him. They beam eerily at him, and Dream reaches for his napkin, folding it over his lap in an effort to avoid eye contact. Dusk light pours onto his features from regal windows, leaving violet shadows over his face. He finally glances up, attempting to keep his face composed. But his eyes reveal all, cast downward and dipped in something blue, waiting to be exploited once more.

"What is it, then?" he asks sharply, leaving his hands in his lap.

"Not even a greeting?" his father inquires, brow arched. "You should be more polite."

Dream glances to his right, away from the pretentious faces, running his tongue over the back of his teeth. He manages a tight smile, meeting the scrutiny of their gazes again. "Hi," he says flatly.

His father sizes him up with all the reverence of a nameless trinket. Dream's insides turn. "We didn't raise you like this," his father scolds.

Dream nearly rolls his eyes, "Can we just get to it?"

His father removes his gaze from Dream, instead opting to squint out the door, "Once we've had our first course."

There is soon an abundance of trays waving in the air atop careful hands. They're placed on the smooth surface of the table, a variety of splendid artistically crafted dishes laid out before him but Dream only glares at the grotesque array of sparkling china. Nevertheless, he fills his plate and pours his glass full of wine. It's wonderful, as always, never an error.

They finish appetizers, all fancy cheese, shrimp, and citrus. Soon another parade of helping hands pile into the room, adorned with silver trays a bit larger than the ones already on the table. Those, however, are carried swiftly away and quickly replaced. There are mounds of lush delicacies, and it's really a bit much and quite a shame because there's no way three people can finish all of it, they never do. But there's no room for sensibility when your majesty requests a grandeur meal.

They're halfway through scarfing down the main course when Dream's father clears his throat, dabbing the corners of his mouth with a cream cloth napkin. He takes a sip of scarlet, washing away any lingering flavors or secrecy. Dream's in the middle of cutting into a thick steak and he turns a careful eye to his father, who regards him with pride. Pride for himself, never pride for Dream, but pride nonetheless.

"Dream," he starts, voice riddled with gusto.

"Dad," Dream mocks, voice wary. His father continues anyway, not missing a beat and tone not faltering.

"As you know, I've been attempting to mend relations with the Harrison family."

"And what does this have to do with me," Dream says curtly, popping a piece of steak into his mouth.

"I'll get there," his father placates, raising a palm toward Dream, "I want peace between us. The

Harrisons would be excellent partners."

"Yes, we know," Dream mutters impatiently, "They're wealthy, kiss their ass, blah blah blah."

"Dream!" his mother reprimands, "You better sit quiet and listen to your father. Don't say a bad word about the Harrisons, do you understand?"

Dream quiets at that but inwardly rolls his eyes, resuming to cut a chunk out of his steak.

"There isn't much we can offer them, Dream," his father continues firmly. "However, I met with them today."

Dream is about to fall asleep on top of his steak if they don't get on with it.

"We discussed, negotiated. I offered many things. There is one thing they wanted, Dream. One thing I could offer them."

Dream sighs, staring at the gold blade sawing in front of him, face tired. "What's that?" he contributes dully.

His father straightens up, chin held high and he beams down on Dream. He inhales easily, calmly, then exhales as Dream patiently waits and waits, the moment lingering on forever. Finally, his father smoothes out his features, lips parting to announce.

"Dream, you are to be wed."

Heavy gold clatters against porcelain. Dream's face hardens instantly, his skin turning to stone and threatening to crumble. His eyebrows set low over his eyes, which swim with deep, muddy turmoil. He feels it fill his veins, the fire, his heart thumping angrily, sporadically.

"You— *what?* " he seethes, skin burning. His eyes blaze, drilling deep into his father's.

"Dream, darling," his mother attempts, reaching a hand out. His gaze snaps toward her instantly, his own hand slipping into his lap.

"Are you serious?" he demands. His mind swirls, storming. His father remains calm.

"Their son is a lovely boy," he says lowly, simply.

Dream scoffs. As if that matters. His family just *gave him away*, just like that. To settle a dispute between riches, to seal a *business deal*. Described him as an offering, like he's a little trinket to be auctioned. He's going to be forced into a *marriage*. After everything, he's not even granted the liberty of choosing who he's to spend his life with, not granted the liberty of falling in love.

He feels a wall build over his eyes, a glossy film. An iridescent glass window.

His eyes set on his mother, searching for sensibility in hers.

"Mom," he asks quietly.

She stares, shoulders squared and pushed back, chin held high. Her gaze is shallow, two-dimensional and empty, empty, empty. She swallows promptly.

"Dream, please cooperate. I'm very sure you will adore the Harrisons' boy, and this is an excellent opportunity for us. What's done is done. We are asking you, don't make this difficult," and it's like she's reading a script. Dream hates their posh lingo.

His chest falls empty, the chambers of his lungs vacant of air. His heart still pounds violently, drumming in his ears and echoing through his skull as the room falls to complete silence.

An opportunity. An opportunity is what he's worth.

The silence kills, tears his insides as oceans swell in front of his eyes. His throat is dry and aching, closing in on him. He reaches a hand up to tug at his collar, craving to rip the fabric away. The color in his irises withers away, leaving a drop of ink in stale grey. A royal tragedy.

His monarchs gaze back wickedly, heartlessly. His father dares to take a sip of wine, blood on his lips.

Dream slowly removes his napkin from his lap, grief surpassed by anger. He stands, porcelain skin on fire and his fingers are sharp and burn wildly as he wipes away sinful tears from his eyes. Velvet fire gnaws at his veins. His wounds bite. And when he speaks, words barely there as they arise from a raw throat and sing weakly, he feels himself turn to dust. Or maybe it's ashes.

"I'll never forgive you," he whispers.

He soon disappears through the door, slipping away like a fragile sheet of paper through the crevices. He passes through the endless hallway, walls caving, and in passing, he feels the emptiness of every room. Cruel, scarlet and bloodstained Persian rugs in every corner, always a curling velvet couch peeking out of parlor rooms, tragically gorgeous brushstrokes trapped by gold frames, billowing and translucent lilac curtains longing to escape, all suffocating in sinister walls and curious ceilings. And Dream's veins curl at all of it.

And his mind whirls and his lungs labor and his heart tears and his stomach is poured full of burning milk and honey.

I offered many things.

Clenched fists push past nauseous and nauseating decor.

There is one thing they wanted.

One thing I could offer them.

They tug at smooth strands of hair, ones that smell of rotten roses.

You are to be wed.

Dream pushes through bulky prison doors into sharp wintry air. It drips of ice and all things blue, and provides some relief to the fire licking through him. He stumbles past thorn bushes ornamented with vain vermillion petals, all the while ripping at the buttons enclosed around his throat and throwing the cuffs squeezing his elbows down toward his wrists.

He soon meets wicked and vine gates, the ebony trails of steel morbid. Then he finds uneven pavement disappearing in each direction. So he follows it.

It's a winding, rocky path. It's pale skies and clouds that look like they're melded from acrylics. He follows it until it's violet and burnt orange strewn across baby blue, and then until it's deep, deep sapphire and winking stars and a loud moon plastered to the top of the sky, high on its pedestal. He chases the horizon endlessly.

His lousy button-up is now tugged wide open and untucked from his waistband, his fingertips

tingling and clutched around a pair of dress shoes. He's shiny, moonlit skin and rosy cheeks and fire-dusted irises canopied by dark lashes. He's a work of art, discarded on the side of the road. And he simply stares up at the sky's proud ornaments, as if they have all the answers.

Occasionally, he chokes on sobs. Occasionally, he's decorated with graceful tears.

Eventually, he wilts back toward "home".

It's a wonder Dream ever tears himself from the plush comfort of his bed. Honestly, he should receive an award for that in itself. He should be crowned king right here and right now for putting up with the absolute shit-pile that is forced marriage.

"*Arranged* marriage," his mother had corrected.

To which he responded, "Same difference when you're talking about a pile of shit."

He was profusely reprimanded.

Now, under hideous, sparkling light, one that peeks through the hideous crystals of his closet's chandelier, (why the fuck does his *closet* require a chandelier???) he searches through the finest of the finest suits and coats and socks and posh dress shoes. However, this time, he's got a stylist with him.

"You must look your best today, darling," his mother sang over the rim of her mug.

"Why? He's forced to marry me anyway, my *attire* certainly will have no effect," Dream spit back through a mouthful of quiche.

"*Arranged*. The Harrisons must see the best of our family, we must be professional. This is business, after all."

Dream's stomach twisted into countless knots at that.

"Well, to be quite honest," the stylist's dignified voice announces through perfectly rosy and thin lips, "I've never styled someone for a meeting with their arranged groom."

"*Forced*," Dream mutters, folding his arms together. The man coughs uncomfortably.

"I'll see what I can do."

Dream slumps onto the velvet ottoman placed in the center of his suffocating closet, watching as the man dashes between sections. He ticks his head to the side at a pair of cornflower pants, lifts his chin at a heavy scarlet blazer, hums thoughtfully at a row of plain button-ups, hums pleasantly at a row of patterned ones, rubs his thumbs over textures of incredibly different fabrics, taps his index finger against his lips at Dream's wall of shoes. Dream watches tiredly. Until *finally*, a bundle of clothes is tossed into his hands and he stares blankly at plum fabric.

"Put it on," the man instructs firmly, slipping out of the closet and pulling the door shut behind him. Dream blinks at the pile before him for a moment before standing slowly, stripping the silk pajama pants and thin cotton shirt that currently adorn him. He pulls on his new outfit tentatively.

Dream glares at himself in the mirror. His hair is currently mussed from sleep, something that will no doubt soon be fixed, replaced with mousse that sticks to the blond strands. His eyes are weary, shattered glass and jade pools. The slope of his jaw is defeated, sharp but lazy. Unruly freckles spot the apples of his cheek and the bridge of his nose. But his outfit.

Dream has never felt so thoroughly repulsed, yet magnificent at the same time.

He's dressed to the nines, garbed in a full, rich mulberry suit, one so smooth Dream's convinced it's woven from clouds. His wrists are weighed down by heavy, golden cuff-links, a swirling pattern embedded into the thick stud. The dress shirt tucked underneath his suit jacket is clean white and strictly shaped. His jacket buttons firmly around his waist. His feet are suffocated in charcoal grey socks and jet-black and polished oxfords.

When the stylist reenters the room, he embellishes Dream with accessories. He orders Dream to strap his chunky watch over his wrist and then hands him an array of rings. They're thick and gold, each with a different pattern. There are three, and he instructs Dream to put two on one hand and one on the other. Dream complies, stuffing two onto the ring and middle finger of his left hand one onto the middle finger of the other. It's grossly lavish. Dream wonders how much money he's carrying on each of his fingers.

When he stumbles out of the closet, he's met with a parade of hairstylists, even though he could very well do his hair himself. But no, Dream is pushed onto a tall chair in the center of a crowded bathroom and his hair is the center of attention. It's tugged in all different directions, doused in a handful of products, until it looks adequate according to the group of giggling hair-doers.

When Dream finally makes it out of his room, choking on the perfume of hair products, his parents are already ready and standing happily beside the staircase.

"You look splendid, darling," his mother coos. Dream can not even begin to care.

They step politely down perfect steps that curl into themselves, and Dream's stomach clenches more the further down the staircase they get. They finally land on flat ground, and Dream's mother begins barking orders at scrambling and well-groomed employees. Dream stares at the heavy wood of the front door empty, dreading the intruders soon to burst through.

Eventually, an overwhelmed young man in a maroon waistcoat approaches his majesty. He announces something lowly to her, and Dream strains his ears but still can't make out the words. She nods with a flat smile and swats him away until he's scurrying down the hallway once again. Dream waits for instruction or a notification, but his mother remains silent, hands clasped tightly together and face poised. Dream's chest burns.

Minutes pass, minutes of silence, and his parents remain with perfect posture and prestigious faces. Dream fidgets with his bulky cuff-links, lips twisted downward and eyelashes casting deep shadows over his irises. His frown only deepens when a hand settles on his shoulder.

"Dream."

Dream straightens, smoothing out his suit jacket and glaring at the door straight ahead of him. "Yeah, yeah," he mutters, "I'll cooperate."

His mother sighs, as if she doesn't believe him, or trust him. "You are to speak proper and act properly as long as they're here."

Dream's jaw clenches, "I know."

"Chin held high, my son."

Dream takes a step toward the door, eyes cold, violent steel.

"Don't call me that."

The family steps out into smooth, bitter air. They stand atop pristine and gleaming steps, their very own pedestal. Dream looks over the garden, studying the webs of rose bushes and listening to the smooth *plop* of water pouring into the pool of the fountain. He tugs restlessly on his sleeves and the collar of his shirt.

A carriage pulls up outside of the strangling gates, and Dream has to roll his eyes at that. It's a rich mahogany color, the shape of a magnet and graced with extravagant gold detailing. The wheels are tall and wide, the crystal windows holding wine-colored curtains.

A man steps out, hair spoiled with bits of silver and eyes graced with secrets and sins. The woman beside him holds similar eyes, warped and sinister irises that wind deep. They're both dressed in grand costumes. The man in a ruby, or perhaps blood, red suit that no doubt weighs on his shoulders. It's the uniform of a villain, it's snakeskin. The woman dons an ebony dress that hangs off the edges of her shoulders, the v-shaped neckline fading into long, slender sleeves that just barely brush the heels of her hands. It shimmers in cloudy sunlight.

Dream swallows dread and waits for a younger face to step out of the carriage. However, the door shuts, and the older couple saunter simply through the front garden toward the pedestal Dream begins to feel uneasy on top of.

The man's voice is low, dripping with venom. "Hello, Charles."

A small, perfectly polite smile lights Dream's father's lips. "Monty, a pleasure to see you again."

They clasp hands firmly, powerfully. Then *Monty* shakes hands with Dream's mother, as the woman accompanying Monty moves smoothly to shake hands with Dream's father.

Dream watches with cautious eyes, glares at the slick movements and fake grins. Until he's met with the face of vice, the hand of the person who *wanted* him.

Dream does his best to keep his face composed as he lifts his hand, his throat itching and crawling with a million words he'll never get to say. His hand slides into the grasp of the man before him, one who owns a strong hand and a tight hold on Dream. Dream's eyes fall helpless and open as they search through the dark ones boring into his.

"Dream, sir," he manages to choke out. The man's eyebrows lift instantly.

"Dream?"

Dream nods, forces a smile that comes out broken. "S' my name."

Monty nods back, surveys Dream with an eerie smile. "Lovely to meet you."

Somehow, Dream disagrees.

He's then met with the woman, whose soft, heart-shaped face is only ruined by her eyes. Dream has come to learn that eyes reveal everything. They shake hands, and she surveys him too. She surveys him with button eyes and a stitched-on smile. Dream inwardly shudders.

"We apologize," Monty announces after introductions, with an almost-sincere smile, "George will be arriving shortly. There were complications."

George.

Dream swallows, the skin under his lavish suit writhing.

"That's alright," Dream's father responds with a pleasant grin, "We'll just start with the delicacies. Shall we?" He extends a hand toward the gaping entrance revealed by open doors, and receives a polite nod before the couple swiftly strides into the house.

They wander determinedly past decorated walls and closed doors, watched by eerie ceilings. Dream remains silent as the couple compliments polished decor and professionally designed rooms.

George. Of course his name is *George*. He's probably snooty and spoiled, high on *Daddy's money*. He didn't even bother to show up on time for this, for meeting his *fiance*. Where's the respect? Where is this *George*?

They settle in a periwinkle parlor room, one home to tall windows and dusted bookcases, despite the books never being touched. A porcelain tray of teacups and a shiny teapot are soon rushed in, and tea is soon poured. Steam rises from their cups, warms their hands. Dream's never been particularly fond of tea—what's so appealing about herbs and hot water?—but he gulps it down anyway, just so he has something to do.

The set of monarchs around him converse happily, and he doesn't understand any of it nor does he care to. He tunes it out, can't stand the sound of pleasant and posh voices while he awaits the boy he's meant to meet at the end of the aisle. His stomach endlessly turns, veins tainted with something green.

The minutes pass, and George is still nowhere to be found. It's impending doom and only serves to worsen Dream's unrest. He's constantly peeking at the door, willing it to fly open so the evening can be over with already. So he can see the full extent of the affair for himself. See if he should run for the hills. Until finally.

Dream is in the middle of pretending to be interested in the topic of conversation. He's sat straight, nodding and smiling at all the right moments. And he's so enriched in pretending he almost misses the faint *click* of the door handle turning, and then the *swoosh* of the door sliding open.

His smile instantly falls, stomach twisting once more. He keeps his eyes away for the moment, simply sets his teacup down and swallows thickly. But then he hears dull taps, footsteps, and his heart races as he turns to face his designated groom.

The boy is beautiful.

It's clear, smacks you in the face as soon as your eyes land on him and his perfectly sculpted face.

His jawline is sharp, but the shape of it soft. His skin is incredibly serene and fair, draped over perfect cheekbones. The apples of his cheeks wear the barest hint of pink, a shade that also brushes the tip of his nose. His face is framed by satiny, deep chocolate waves. His lips are art in themselves, glossy and rose, plump flower petals embedded in pale skin. His irises swirl with unlimited shades of caramel, shaded by dark, thick lashes. But as Dream stands to meet his face, shake his hand, (noting along the way how short the boy is in comparison,) he's granted a better view of his eyes, searches them. And hidden, *buried*, deep in the undertones of the boy's eyes, is

the barest hint of crimson. Evidence of...tears?

As George reaches out to greet Dream's parents, gaze not having met Dream yet at all, Dream watches him vehemently. The way his lips turn up perfectly into a perfect polite smile, appearing perfectly practiced. The way he bats his eyelashes on beat, delicately, maliciously. The sweet innocence of his round and scarlet cheeks. How, while his eyes make contact with each pair before him, they never match the rest of his face.

And then his parents are sat on the velvet sofa again. And Dream is met face to face with the boy.

It's strange, having seen the boy from afar and having studied him as he appeared; like a painting, and now seeing him up close. What's possibly stranger is how strange Dream feels in doing so. Like he shouldn't be standing face to face with this boy, shouldn't see him or know him in this way. It sends chills down his spine, how everything he saw before, every crack in the porcelain of the boy's skin, now seems more obvious, more apparent. Dream doesn't realize he's holding his breath until George speaks.

"I'm George," he declares simply, extending a hand. The unfamiliarity of the voice makes Dream realize this is the first time he's hearing it, that during the past two introductions Dream's ears simply rang. George's voice carries a thin accent and an incredibly posh manner, obviously feigned. Dream swallows, skin itching.

He raises his hand to meet George's. The boy's hand is cold. "I'm Dream."

George's brows lower, but his smile remains untouched. "Your name is Dream?"

Dream tears his hand away, eyes challenging George's. "It is."

"Is that your real name?"

Dream scowls slightly. "That's my name," is all he says. George seems unsatisfied but nevertheless moves on.

"You have a lovely home," he comments, seating himself beside his parents. His delicate shoulders and short legs display a dark copper suit, framing his waist perfectly. "I apologize for my late arrival. I hope I didn't miss too much?"

"It's really no problem," Dream's mother consoles with a bright smile, "We were simply discussing the differences between—"

And Dream tunes out again.

As he poses as a proper son who knows all about the industry and is invested in the group's hot takes, Dream observes George. He comes to find that George seems to be exactly how Dream expected he would be.

George's laugh reveals enough in itself. His curly and bouncing rings of chuckles leave Dream's skin crawling. It's just too *perfect*. Like he doesn't really find amusement in the words being said, like he's practiced and practiced this artificial laugh and throws it into the air at all of the right moments. Like it's a little tool in his back pocket that drops like a bomb to Dream's ears. It's terribly unsettling, the phantom of a laugh, and it raises the hairs on Dream's neck.

His words are another sort of awful. They're repulsive. Yes, they ring perfectly through the room and are laid out perfectly and articulated perfectly and chosen perfectly but it's so *inhumane*. It's gross and fancy, it's a perfect reflection of the crystals swaying from the chandelier. It's like

George knows he's gorgeous and charming everyone in the room (minus a foul royal son across from him, but he doesn't know that) and could have anything at the snap of his fingers, not only because of his family's insane wealth.

The way he carries himself plays into this, too. His ankles are crossed, and he probably calculated the angle at which the perfect ankle-crossing would be because it just comes off so *perfect*. And his shoulders are pushed back, his spine perfectly straight, his chin tipped upwards. And his delicate hands hold a teacup and small porcelain plate gently in his lap, occasionally lifting to his pursed, eighth-wonder lips. Dream *almost* envies how smooth every movement is.

But his smile. His smile is what upsets Dream the most. It's positively the most blood-curdling, spine-chilling act Dream has ever witnessed. Because although George grins politely at every moment, lifts his lips higher when someone says something particularly sweet, or bares his teeth at the funny comments that don't quite deserve a laugh, Dream never sees him smile. It's frustrating, pulls at Dream's gut, but most of all it's horrifying. Watching every empty excuse of a smile and then watching it disappear as quick as it comes, sink into George's milky skin and fade away into his back pocket where he will soon retract it from again. Just like the laugh. But somehow, the smile is worse.

So Dream comes to the conclusion that George is the arrogant son of a monarch, perfectly bred and perfectly polite, fake in every sense of the word, and spoiled from the day he learned how to bark an order.

And Dream would much rather marry anyone besides the ghost before him.

So of course it's as soon as he decides this that he's forced away with the boy named George.

"Why don't you two get to know each other," his mother requests, ushering them out the door, "We have some things to go over and some things to discuss."

And then the door is shutting in their face and Dream is standing alone beside someone who's hardly there.

"Well," George says, dusting his hands off (god knows what exactly he's dusting off, but Dream supposes he's just being a snob).

Dream blinks at the door slowly and swallows his disdain. "Um, there's," he sideways glances at George, "There's a balcony."

George lifts his chin impossibly higher, clasping his hands behind his back. "Perfect. I love balconies."

Somehow Dream doubts that George *loves* anything.

"This way," Dream mumbles, starting down the hallway without another word or glance in George's direction.

George does his best to keep up, but Dream's legs are much taller and take longer strides, so he ends up a few feet ahead of George. Dream is okay with that.

"Are all of your ceilings painted as such?" George asks.

Dream looks up at the scene dusted across the ceiling, angels and flora and fauna, all in faded pastels and soft acrylics. He walks faster.

"Most," is all he says.

"How come?" a clean voice continues.

"Because my mom likes art."

Dream's voice is flat and unkempt compared to George's, not tainted with false politeness nor sweetness because he really would not like to be here and he doesn't care if he shows it.

"Do you mind slowing down a bit?" George asks, and Dream can hear the strain in his voice from trying to keep up. Dream comes to a stop suddenly, his shoes squeaking against tile and the noise bouncing off of the ceilings high above them. Dream feels a small body collide with his back.

"Ough!"

Dream turns, finding George stumbling backward and nearly falling to the floor. Dream can't help but smile just as George regains his balance. As soon as George recognizes the emotion his brows dip low over his eyes, his jaw clenching hard.

"You think this is funny?" he huffs. Dream's smile only widens. George's scowl only deepens.

"Keep up," Dream orders, "And watch where you're going."

"Excuse me?"

Dream's already turned around again, unbuttoning his plum jacket and tugging it off. He holds it by his side as he stalks off toward the end of the hallway once again.

"I said, keep up."

There are soon footsteps scrambling after him.

They walk under the eyes of a fake bed of roses painted above them for moments longer, George always remaining a few steps behind and Dream never caring to send a look his way or wait for him to catch up. They're soon nearing a glass door, and Dream notes the state of the sky. Deep indigo and embedded with little gems, Dream smiles at that. He pushes through the doors into fresh night.

"Balcony," he announces with a sigh, finally facing George. George looks like he's straining to contain words, or emotions from entering his face.

He crosses his arms, his delicate figure framed by the doorway. "It's lovely," he says, voice strangled like he's trying his best to keep his politeness intact, despite Dream's opposite manner. Dream watches him for a moment, his smooth features and closed-off eyes. Then he turns, opting to watch the sky instead and press his forearms to the railing of the balcony, jacket discarded on the floor and sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

"Mhm."

"Do you suppose we'll have one as nice?"

Dream's stomach twists at that, his chest tightening. He closes his eyes. "No," he answers dully.

"No?"

"No."

George is quiet for a moment. Dream attempts to soothe the venom burning through his veins.

"So, *Dream*," George finally manages, "Any hobbies? Interests?"

Dream's jaw clenches hard, eyes dark as if stained with the night sky. "I'm not allowed, *George*," he bites.

"Not allowed?"

"I'm not allowed to do anything except for what I'm told."

Dream hears a sharp intake of breath. "Pardon?"

"You don't have to keep talking like that," he snaps, twirling around to glare at the perfect picture before him. George blinks.

"Excuse me—"

"Just talk like a normal person," Dream huffs, "You sound robotic."

George scowls. "A normal person?"

"*Yes*, god, please," Dream seethes, "If I'm going to be stuck with you at least drop the act."

George's face hardens, his arms tightening where they're crossed over his chest. "I'm sorry, is a *normal person* as ill-mannered as you?" he sneers, "I don't know what '*act*' you're referencing, and I deeply apologize if you feel '*stuck with me*', but I'm not too pleased with any of this either." The caramel of his eyes has darkened to molasses. "Believe me, I would much rather be marrying someone of *my* choice rather than having to be inconvenienced by you and your vulgar comments."

Dream's gaze hardens, hands clenched by his sides. "You're so up your own ass."

"Excuse me?"

"You know, just because you talk all prim and proper doesn't mean you're better than anyone else."

George stares for a moment, offended and defensive. His eyes swirl, better yet *storm*. "Are you sure *you're* the one I'm meant to marry," he spits, voice raw, "There must've been a mix-up. How could I be expected to marry someone so barbaric."

"Barbaric?" Dream scoffs, "Sorry, *sweetheart*, we're not all as fake and arrogant as you."

"You don't even *know* me."

"It's not hard to figure out. You're pretty two-dimensional."

"Please," George sneers, "And *you're* Mister Complexity?"

Dream matches his condescending gaze, challenges it.

"It's clear," George continues, "You loathe the life you possess, angry at the world, and so on and so on. *Spoiler alert*, no one cares."

"Oh wise one, show me your ways," Dream mocks.

"Didn't anyone ever train you to have manners?"

"I'm not a dog, thanks," Dream spits. "I'm sure you know all about that, though, with a father of that caliber."

"Don't speak ill of my father," George threatens.

Dream hums, patronizing. "Daddy's boy, are we? Bet that gets you all the luxuries you so desire. Just bat your eyelashes and twirl your hair and—"

"I can't believe someone so immature is deemed fit for a husband, let alone *me*."

"What are you implying?" Dream snarls.

George stands taller, attempting to seem threatening despite the height difference. "You're *vile*, a complete brute. Your mouth's too big and loud and it's a wonder you come from such a high-class family. Clearly, they went wrong somewhere. If you were truly a prince fit for a prince, you would know when to swallow your pride and deal with the worst when it's good for business. You're unprofessional. I can't believe my parents would want your family as a partner. And I can't believe *I'm* the one stuck dealing with the consequences."

Fire seeps through Dream's veins, turns his self-control to ashes. "You're no doll yourself, *Prince*," he bites back, "Your self-righteousness is hideous, and your posh attitude is more condescending than it is polite. This whole 'Perfect By Design' campaign is disturbing to watch. Maybe just, I don't know, try to be a *little bit* human?"

Dream watches something simmer below the surface of George's face, below his mask. He feeds on it.

"But you were raised that way, right? Perfect prince, gets everything he wants. *Trained*."

George falls silent, the words soaking into his taut skin and tense frown. After a long, stiff moment he glances away, looks toward the moon.

It's quiet. Dream hears the stars bursting and the heavens feasting. He waits, the dark blanket of sky pounding on his back instead of wrapping him in warmth. A breath of life finally touches George's lips.

"You couldn't be more wrong," he mutters, words blazing but somehow soft.

Dream watches the fair skin and empty eyes that only a ghost could possess disappear behind transparent doors. With a faraway sigh and a tired dream, he tugs his collar open.

It's *supposed* to be celebratory. Dream can't help but feel the need to wear black, can't help but feel like it's a funeral he's attending instead of a party.

He extends his arms out by his sides, palms facing the floor. The tongue of a tape measure licks across his chest, breathes below his chin. It measures his wingspan.

"I don't see the—" the tape measure is snapped away, "—point in this," it wraps snugly around his

waist, "Why don't I just pick something from my closet like always?"

His mother slides her fingers together and places her locked hands over her knee, the one that owns a bouncing foot. "It's different."

"It's only a party."

She sighs, standing and smoothing her dress out just as the tape measure strangles Dream's chest, "It's celebrating a marriage between royal families, Dream," she reminds firmly, "Clearly you don't understand the weight of this matter."

Dream's jaw clenches at her tone, scolding, reprimanding, patronizing him. His arms fall to his sides as the smothering ribbon is pulled away. "Enlighten me," he mutters dully. It's drawn up from his ankle, assessing his leg.

His mother paces, face set. She stops in front of him, shielding the glittering mirror with barren dark eyes.

"Marriage between royals, Dream," she starts, wrinkles enunciated, "Is the birth of new monarchs."

Dream's stomach curls, his fingers mimicking as skin is pulled taut over his knuckles, fire-tainted veins exposed.

"You and George are soon to be the new royal family."

Family. Dream doubts she even knows what that word means.

"*You*," it drips of distrust and evaluation, "will be the faces of wealth, of business. People will turn to you for deals, for opportunities." She folds her arms, eyes webbed deep with demands, sticky pupils boring deep into Dream's. "At this party, everyone will be looking at you, Dream. Because that is what you represent. A prey worth gold."

Dream's veins shudder, his eyebrows setting lower.

"And you are very well a reflection of our family and what we can offer."

Dream attempts a breath but the air is knitted into knots, and he can't swallow it.

She ticks her head to the side. "Don't mess this up."

The click of raven heels echoes through Dream's skull.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!! More George and Drama in the chapters to come :)
If you enjoyed, feel free to drop a kudos! This was an introduction chapter, so I'm very excited to get into the story and do more with these characters. Lots planned!

You're lovely xo

Party Favors and Party-Favors

Chapter Summary

Party Rock Anthem let's go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The next time Dream speaks to George, his manner is entirely different.

They stand before a vast, unfamiliar room. There are marble floors Dream can literally see sparkle, towering walls caging them in, arched, opalescent windows carrying thick curtains, and a kaleidoscope ceiling, one so far away it makes Dream dizzy. And of course, a chandelier. Because what is a lavish venue without a chandelier?

Hustling bodies scurry all across the room, sometimes nearly running into Dream and the boy next to him. They carry happy dining furniture, plush chairs and tables far too fancy only to be covered by satin tablecloths.

And then there's George, who's entirely different to the George Dream met only a few days ago.

George doesn't attempt polite conversation or hide behind posh smiles. George is quiet, reserved. Watching the room fill. It's perhaps eerier than their first meeting, which Dream didn't think was possible.

George stands with his lips set in a fine line. His cheeks don't hold a childlike rosiness and his chin isn't held high. The only thing that appears the same as it did before are his empty eyes. The deep amber irises are shallow, two-dimensional. His pupils don't smile and his eyelashes are dark, blinking languidly.

He doesn't speak a word to Dream nor does he spare him a glance, and the silence between them overpowers the pounding of footsteps and knocking of furniture. Dream does his best to keep his eyes forward, avoid letting his gaze slip away to the quiet stance of the boy beside him.

What's possibly the eeriest is how quickly George can change.

One moment he's standing in silent protest, vacant and stuck and lifeless. But all it takes is their parents to approach them or a man towing furniture to request directions and George is back to the clean-cut, bouncy and beaming, prince of the year. It's like he's awoken from stone. But once the person has passed, Medusa arrives once again to curse the boy and leave Dream in unbearable silence and restless nerves. Until he gives in.

"Are you excited for the party," Dream asks lamely, and it's been so long since he's spoken he doesn't even recognize his own voice, feels disconnected from it.

George finally turns to him, gazing upward with dull eyes. Dream studies them, attempts to understand them. He's left lost.

"Not exactly," George answers simply, and then he's glaring at passing bodies again, eyes slipping

away from Dream's grasp.

Dream swallows, taking a step back. "Right. Well, I'll be off, then."

That receives a second glance from George, this one with low brows and hard eyes. "What do you mean you'll 'be off'?"

"I *mean*, there's nothing for me to do here," Dream answers slowly, taking another step back.

"We're meant to be supervising," George reprimands, arching a brow and giving Dream a look that suggests he's being outrageous.

"You seem to be doing fine on your own," Dream says simply. Then he turns on his heel and attempts his escape. A delicate hand catches his wrist before he can get very far.

"This is your party too," George reminds, voice sharp. Dream glares over his shoulder, ripping his arm away from the boy's grip.

"No, it's not."

George's features soften slightly, but his firm gaze remains. "Dream," he demands.

Dream turns suddenly, towering over George with a cold, desolate stare. "No offense, *George*, but there are many things I would rather be doing than standing here and '*supervising*' an already dreadful party with *you*."

George stares for a moment before he scoffs and turns away, his face actually seeming shocked.

"You're insufferable," he mutters.

Dream's body floods with sapphire flames. "How am I—"

"You know there are much worse things," George announces bitterly, facing Dream again, "Than an arranged marriage."

Dream's fingers curl into fists, his heart pounding in disagreement.

"Especially given our circumstance," George continues, face barren.

"The marriage would be fine," Dream declares, jaw clenched and brows furrowed. His veins rush with anger, with grief. "If it wasn't with you."

He doesn't know why he said it. As soon as the words leave his mouth, he's turning and starting toward the exit. And that's when the weight of his words hit him.

It seemed like the right thing to say in the moment, the only thing that would shut George up. And that it certainly did. The silent face it revealed is burned into Dream's memory. It earned a special place in the gallery, a gallery infected with dark, writhing shadows.

When the words touched the air, George's mask came peeling off. His eyes swirled with muddy, amber turmoil. It seeped into his skin, turned the plane of his face into a bare, desolate place. Riddled with cracks in pale cheeks. His lips fell flat, the perfect pink tint stolen by words. They wilted slightly open, his eyelashes fluttering in disbelief. And it was all just a withered, broken version of George. One of his many faces. More real than the sophisticated phantom of a human and louder than his quiet and reserved self, but somehow sadder than both.

The tips of Dream's fingers sting and his throat tightens, but he continues toward the end of the long room, aching to leave the place holding the presence of a broken boy he wishes he never knew.

The next three days are spent in preparation for the party.

On the first day, Dream meets his costume. He's just entered his room after a lonely brunch, his parents at a forever-lasting meeting. Draped over his bed is the casket for an outfit, and he instantly knows it's his specially designed garb for the funeral of his freedom. Reluctantly, he approaches the bed and reaches a slender hand out to unzip the case.

It's definitely posh. Perhaps a bit too posh. But it's definitely meant to announce him as the heart of the evening. The eye of the storm, rather.

The suit is champagne, crawling with a shimmering laurel pattern only half a shade lighter. The pants are the same, and Dream thinks he'll definitely look ridiculous. But in the world of royals, ridiculous means expressing your wealth, and that's how they get away with it. The button-up underneath is almost too bright to be white, exceptionally clean and wrinkle-free. An ivory bow tie hangs from the collar, mocking Dream where he stands with narrowed eyes and folded lips.

It's definitely something.

On the second day, Dream is to approve a menu hand-picked by his "other half". He's sat in one of their many parlor rooms and handed a list of ornate delicacies. Dream doesn't even understand what half of the words mean, or why they have to describe dishes with such elaborate verbs. There's the classiest of the classiest foods, each sounding far too fancy for something he wants to put in his mouth and far too expensive for a simple celebratory party.

He skims over each dish before deciding that he can not even bring himself to care, and pushes the menu back to the nice lady who handed it to him with a mere, "That's fine."

On the third day, Dream is asked to visit the venue and approve of the decorations. Dream is sure they're perfectly lavish and not a hair out of place, but he agrees anyway.

He enters through a broad doorway into the once-empty room he last saw a few days ago. It's been completely transformed since that day, and Dream almost can't believe they put this much effort into a party for *him*. Well, him and a certain somebody else.

There are clothed tables scattered all around the room, each precisely distanced. They hold carefully designed place settings, each completed with golden and polished cutlery. Clean napkins and flower-spoiled placemats envelop porcelain plates. Every table has its own shimmering crystal vase complete with scarlet roses. The tables on the edges of the room hold magnificent trays and platters, which are surely soon to be filled with intricate delicacies. The walls hold satin streamers and the chandelier sprinkles warm, dim light over the room. And in the center of it all, admiring decorated tables and not yet wilted flowers, is George.

He strides slowly and carefully toward the center of the room, weaving through tables with his hands stuffed into his pockets. George never looks up from the table he studies, fidgeting with the corner of a placemat. As Dream grows nearer, he notices the soft, somber smile just barely

touching George's lips.

Dream stops less than a foot behind the boy, breathing slowly and waiting for something. Maybe George will slap him. Maybe George will turn and leave without a word. Maybe George will shout, or maybe he'll whisper sadly.

The moment drags on for far too long, and Dream simply watches as George's fingers trail from the placemat to the shiny silverware to the artfully folded napkin. His hand is delicate in doing so, gentle as to not mess up the perfection of the setting before him. Bronze shadows paint his features, like mellow bruises. The silence hurts, exerts pressure on Dream's skull. Until it's broken by quiet and silky words.

"Can you believe this is all for us?" George inquires gently, fingers ghosting over petals so dark against his fair skin.

It's not what Dream expected, and he inhales deeply, anxiously. "George," he asks as smoothly as he can manage.

George looks up finally, peering blankly at Dream. His face reveals nothing, his features falling vacant. And his lips reveal nothing, either.

Dream waits for words to slip from them, but they never do. So he continues. "I'm—" he swallows, "I'm sorry."

George stares at the floor, never removing his quiet expression. He doesn't look upset, nor does he look happy.

At last, he looks up once again, eyes not reaching Dream's. He takes a step forward, but it's only to pass Dream. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Without thinking, Dream's hand catches the crook of George's elbow before he can disappear. He glances backward at George, attempting to read his face, but it's hard to read a wordless page. "George," he repeats, more firmly this time.

"I get it, Dream," is all he says before he tears his arm away, slipping toward the shadowy corner of the room.

I get it.

Dream frowns.

The marriage would be fine, if it wasn't with you.

I get it.

Despite Dream's better judgment and personal taste, he put on the ridiculous suit and cheesy bow tie. He let his hair get tugged around and doused in gel and he let himself get dragged to the stupid, extravagant venue. And now he stands before tall, powder blue doors. And he thinks that once he steps through them, he's admitting defeat. But if anything, that's how Dream feels. Defeated. So he

pushes through them with weary eyes.

It's the same as he left it yesterday when he exited through the same doors as three words bounced around his skull. The only difference is the light pouring in through the windows, the sun still very much high in the sky, but not for long. Twilight will arrive soon, painting the room in soft colors before it's replaced by the golden light from the chandelier.

Dream's eyes are drawn away from the menacing row of windows when he notices someone rapidly approaching him. His eyes land on the void face of a boy he's meant to know, and when his eyes drag downward Dream realizes why it was so imperative that his suit be specially designed.

"You have got to be kidding me," he mutters.

George, now only a few feet away, is adorned in a champagne suit as well. His, however, does not wear a floral pattern and instead remains smooth. A waistcoat of the same color is tucked underneath his jacket, over a white dress shirt with an empty collar. Groom and groom, their suits were designed to match.

"What the hell are you wearing," Dream complains when George lands in front of him. George arches a brow, slightly startled at the comment. His eyes fall down to his own attire, then study Dream's, then return to Dream's face.

"Pardon?" he inquires, which receives an eye-roll from Dream, "We're meant to complement each other."

"You knew we were going to match?" Dream whines.

George looks lost, taken aback. "Yes?"

Dream shakes his head and sighs, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "Whatever. At least I don't look like the biggest idiot in the room now," he mumbles.

George frowns slightly, before shaking his head in dismissal. He bends his arm naturally, fist placed against his stomach, and extends the crook of his elbow toward Dream.

Dream stares at the offering. "What?"

"We're..." George looks like he's about ready to give up and stride away, leave Dream behind, "We're meant to attend the party together? It's sort of ours—"

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Dream grumbles, receiving alarmed eyes from George. He tucks his hand around George's elbow probably a bit too aggressively, but it's a ridiculous gesture to begin with and Dream would like to make that much clear.

The room is crawling with people dressed in slick suits and sparkling dresses, clinking glasses and laughing easily. He doesn't recognize most of the people, despite this being his own party, but George seems to recognize each and every face. He greets everyone with either a smile or a wave, occasionally extending a hand and making a verbal greeting. Dream simply watches, dragged along by George's elbow.

Once George has welcomed a vast majority of the party and doesn't seem like he plans on stopping soon, Dream pulls his hand away, slipping toward the edge of the room.

"I need a drink," he mumbles in explanation. George says nothing, only watches as he goes.

There's a champagne fountain. A fucking *champagne fountain*. Dream would throw a mental tantrum about it, except he's sort of in need of happy, glittering alcohol. So he takes a slender glass and fills it until foam touches the brim. Then he grabs a second, decides he'll act like a proper, sappy fiancé, and fills that one too.

He finds George with a hand clasped to one of an older man, a man with silver hair and gold eyes. He's surrounded by people of the same caliber, all looking at George like they could trick and deceive and take from the boy, and it makes Dream's skin itch. George smiles a phantom smile at the man, perfect and polite, before his eyes find Dream.

"Did you know there's a champagne fountain?" is the first thing Dream says.

George's head ticks slightly to the side. "Yes, I'm the one who approved it."

Dream blinks. "Oh." *Of course*. He pushes a now half-empty glass toward George, "Here."

George glances down at it, eyes flat. "No thank you," he says simply.

Dream stares incredulously, then sends a glance over George's shoulder at the vultures now retreating. "Trust me, if you want to get through tonight, you're gonna need this," Dream declares, shoving it forward again.

George's eyes meet his, and they're frowning slightly. "That's quite alright."

Dream sighs, sending George an eye-roll as he thrusts the glass into the hands of the next person that passes. They take it, startled, but take it nonetheless. Dream takes a sip from his own glass, glitter rushing down his throat in the form of liquid poison.

"Are you going to greet anyone?" George asks, "You've been rather quiet."

Dream shrugs, surveying the room and the people scattered around it. "I don't know these people," he answers simply.

"Neither do I," George reasons.

"What do you mean, you've just said hi to nearly everybody."

A small scowl lands on George's face. "Yes, because they're our guests."

Dream scoffs. "They're not our guests, they're our predators."

George's scowl twists further at that. "Excuse me?"

Dream clenches his jaw, refusing to meet George's curious gaze. His grip tightens on his glass. "They're looking to exploit us, George. Two young boys soon to be wed, soon to be available as a partner. New to business. It would be easy, to lure us into a trap their wallets would feed off of. They're here to study their prey."

George is silent for a moment, processing Dream's words. Then he turns, face blank.

"We should find our table."

They weave through the many people and the many tables, and as George remains quiet Dream can't help but feel guilty. It was the truth, and George should know. But he still feels as though he spoiled an innocent delusion in George. Like he just told him that the tooth fairy wasn't real. And Dream's stomach twists.

George stops when he reaches a table toward the front, and Dream recognizes the other faces sat there; George's parents, wicked and menacing, and his own sat beside them. There are two chairs left, each for a groom.

George seats himself immediately, but Dream merely watches. The two sets of monarchs, villains, parents, laugh and converse joyfully. They wave glasses in the air and touch cloth napkins the corners of their lips. Dream feels nauseous. He slips past the table, taking a sip from his glass as he heads toward the fountain, and no one seems to notice.

Dream drips slowly down the long line of tables that hold towers of food, the fountain at the end of them. He studies each tray, each skillfully crafted treat. It's a colorful assortment, turning the tables vibrant and lively. Dream's eyes fall somber as they touch each dish, tainted with grief and realization.

This is it. Everyone knows he's to be wed. It's official.

He somehow hoped he would escape, but that hope is long gone now.

He's going to be married. Married to a perfect, hollow, cracked sculpture. A mere puppet of a human. He's going to meet the shadow of a boy at the end of the aisle, and he's going to have to meet that boy at the end of every aisle for possibly the rest of his life.

Dream reaches the fountain, his glass now empty. But it's soon full again, and then it's drained once more. Dream's about to take the first sip of his third glass when a fragile hand lands on his champagne-smothered bicep.

Dream, of course, finds George staring up at him blankly.

"I was sent to find you," he explains, "We're about to start the first course."

Dream refuses to meet the barren, lifeless eyes before him, instead opting to glare out the window. It's dusk, the sky lavender and tinted with grey undertones. He reaches his empty hand up to tear George's hand away, jaw tight. He turns away, hiding his pained face. He sets his glass down on the table.

"Dream," George's voice rings. It sounds like a shard of glass, sharp but still fragile. "It's going to be fine."

Dream turns once more but doesn't meet George's cold and cautious eyes still. He instead pushes past the boy, forcing himself to keep his face composed.

"I somehow doubt that, Pinocchio."

The evening fully commences, in a show of evil champagne and boisterous laughs and lush dishes sprawled over chinaware. Dream engages quietly, occasionally inputting comments when someone asks for it and momentarily letting fake smiles slip out, for the sake of his mother. She watches from across the table with demanding eyes, asking him to at least pretend. He complies.

And while Dream strains to utter posh words and craft polite grins which only come off strangled, George does so easily. Dream would say effortlessly if there wasn't a slight hint of pain in his eyes. But even then his smile makes up for it, gorgeous plush lips invading his cheeks and revealing a shining row of teeth. Dream watches in envy and terror, even admiration at how well George is able to bottle everything up and shove it away.

The first course of appetizers comes to a close, and Dream accepts that as one stage complete, one

round won. The night is hardly close to being over, but each step toward the end is a small victory in itself. Their plates of hors d'oeuvres are whisked away and replaced with the main course. Dream's appetite is surely gone and has been since he sat down, but nevertheless, he puts on a brave face and indulges in the meal.

They're nearly done with the course, some plates being swept away in preparation for dessert when George's father rises from his seat. He lifts his glass along with him, and one clean, glimmering utensil. The two clink together in the hands of evil and Dream braces himself, taking another sip of champagne.

Monty's grin is sinister, sends chills crawling over Dream's skin. "I would like to make a toast," he announces, voice low and velvety, rumbling through the room that has fallen from happy voices and clattering cutlery to silence.

"This evening is in celebration," he continues, chin tilted high. Dream can practically see the crown atop his head. "Of my son and his lovely fiance."

Dream writhes under the scrutiny of unfamiliar and preying eyes. He keeps his own gaze firmly down, blinking at the ivory tablecloth.

"These two gentlemen are soon to be wed, and I could not be more proud of my son. He's come so far, and now is about to start his own family."

Dream chokes on air, his gentle and shaking fingers reaching up to tug at his collar.

"So, to them," Monty declares, raising his glass impossibly higher, "Congratulations, Dream and George."

As soon as Dream looks up, it feels like he's being blinded by a blaring spotlight. All eyes are on him and the boy beside him, and only half a second later the room erupts into applause. It slithers through his ears, rapping at his skull.

Dream forces himself to smile bright, to pretend like he enjoys the attention and enjoys the boy beside him. Who, with all the ease and grace of a trained actor, beams elegantly and raises a hand to wave at the audience.

"Kiss my cheek," George instructs lowly through his grinning teeth.

"*What*," Dream hisses back.

"Kiss my cheek," George repeats. And Dream didn't mean it in that sense, didn't mean *what did you say*. It was more of a *what the fuck are you talking about why would I do that*. But nevertheless, he swallows his pride and mentally curses before leaning over to press pursed lips to George's skin.

Only a moment later the eyes fall away, and everyone returns to their meals. Dream, however, has thoroughly lost his appetite.

He begins pushing off his chair, ready to escape the thick and suffocating air of the room, but a disapproving hand stops him.

"Where are you going?" George asks, brows furrowed.

"You're telling me you normally stay through the whole thing?" Dream bites back.

"You can't *leave*."

"No one notices," Dream defends, glaring by this point because he really needs *air*.

George's gaze is scolding. "I'm sure at your other parties, but in case you haven't noticed, we happen to be the focal point of this one."

"I'll be back," Dream seethes. "I'll only be gone for a moment. No one will notice."

George stares hard for a moment before removing his hand, opting to cross his arms over his chest and glare at nothing in particular straight ahead of him.

"You're welcome to join me," Dream offers, "You clearly don't know how to survive a party."

George only shakes his head.

So Dream stands, striding toward the end of the room where malevolent doors lie.

The night has fully set now, giving way to a chilling breeze and smiling stars. The sky is deep, royal blue and mocking. Dream lets it slide down his throat, kinder than champagne, and settle in the strangled chambers of his lungs. His eyes are wide, accepting starlight. He pulls at the knot of his bow tie until it falls loose around his neck and he's able to release the buttons keeping his collar intact.

Dream stands before the night sky, lonely and quiet, offering himself. To the moon, to the stars, to the sapphire quilt itself, even. He offers his wishes to anything that'll listen. He offers his sins to the night. He lets his face be torn apart, the prim and proper disguise falling to pieces on the pavement. His hopeless, innocent features are revealed, skin white under moonlight and eyes glossy.

A door opens behind him, breaking his fragile loneliness. Dream blinks the tears quickly away but doesn't turn around, already knowing who's joined him.

"Missing your special night?" Dream mutters. The footsteps stop short.

"I just..." there's a pause, "I came to run something by you. Ask you a favor."

Dream huffs a laugh. "You want a favor?"

"Listen," George sighs, tired and hesitant, "You...you can hate me all you want," Dream finally peers at him from beneath heavy lashes, eyes narrowed, "But when it's—" George clears his throat frustratedly. For the first time since Dream has met him, he seems to be struggling for words, and *nervous*. "When we have to, if there's...people watching, or parents—" George swallows, eyes landing on Dream whereas before they were darting in every different direction, "Just pretend. Please."

A small frown tugs at Dream's features. "Pretend?"

George glances away, seemingly embarrassed. Which is a new one. "Pretend to like me."

Something wrenches at Dream's stomach and he turns away. *Oh*.

"That's your favor?" he asks, "Pretend...to like you?"

"Yes," George answers, voice straining, desperate.

Dream glances down at his feet, lips flat. "O-okay."

George exhales in relief, but he doesn't seem finished, or completely satisfied. Dream glances over his shoulder, eyes inquiring. George's eyes are wide, and he fidgets with his fingers.

"Is there something else?" Dream asks finally, when the silence grows too tense.

George swallows, eyes flicking down to the floor before meeting Dream's again. "What do you mean, 'Pinocchio'?"

It's innocent and curious, and Dream immediately turns away once more. He can't answer, doesn't have the heart to.

This silence drags on longer, seeps into Dream's ears and twists his gut. He curls his fingers into a fist where they lay in his pocket, his other hand clutching at his open collar before his fingers dance upwards, sliding over the back of his neck.

"We should go," he says finally. His fingers begin working over his buttons, sliding them into their corresponding slots in the fabric. He turns as he frantically reaches up to retie his bow. George stares at the action emptily, eyes refusing to meet Dream's.

"Do me a favor?" Dream asks, starting toward the door, "Cover for me? My parents are going to be pissed."

The rest of the party is spent in silence between Dream and George, despite the table's never-ending conversation. They hardly even spare a glance in each other's direction. Dream spends most of it staring at his plate or tossing champagne down his throat. His mind buzzes with a million different thoughts and a million different feelings but he never reveals any of them.

His mother seems pleased, at least, when they begin to slip toward home. She carries a bright smile and holds her chin high with pride, praising Dream and commenting relentlessly on the success of the evening. Dream merely nods, but he can't help but feel content that he did at least something right.

When he finally collapses on his bed, lavish suit discarded in a pile (which he'll surely be scolded for), Dream's eyes instantly drift closed. But before sleep has the chance to take him, there's a knock at the door.

"Come in," he murmurs, irritated.

It clicks open, revealing a woman with lively wrinkles still in her party dress. She drifts inside, placing herself neatly at the foot of Dream's bed. There's a quiet moment soon replaced by a smooth, sour voice curling through his ears.

"How did you like the party," she asks, not entirely genuine.

"I'm not," Dream half-smiles, "I'm not exactly a party person."

She purses her lips, a small smile tinting them. "I know," she pauses, folding her hands over her lap, "You and George seem to get on well."

Dream nearly laughs. "Really?" he asks, trying to hide his honest surprise.

"Yes, you," she inhales, studying him, "You seem to naturally act like a couple."

Dream wonders what gave her *that* impression, but he tallies the moments in his head. When George offered his arm, when George carried him through the room like a prize he'd won, when George instructed Dream to kiss his cheek. It was simply George doing what George seems to do best; knowing exactly what to do, exactly how to act, in particular situations.

"Do you like him?" his mother asks curiously. Dream swallows, unsure what answer would be most appropriate. But his thoughts drift to his promise.

When we have to, if there's...

People watching, or parents...

Just pretend. Please.

Dream clenches his jaw, pouring as much false emotion as he can into his eyes.

Pretend to like me.

"Yeah, Mom."

The corners of her lips lift further at that, eyes touched by moonlight pouring in from the slender, crystal windows. Dream's stomach twists.

"I think he's a good influence on you," she admits, "He's a good kid. And mature, too, for his age."

Dream bites the inside of his cheek, nodding slowly. Although he's unsure what about hiding your emotions behind a fake persona is deemed *mature*.

Dream drums his fingers against thin porcelain, steam wafting upwards and bruising his cheeks with warmth.

"I don't understand why we have to do this *now*, and I certainly don't understand why we have to do this *together*," he declares with disdain.

George shakes his head as if Dream were an uncooperative child, arms extended out by his sides. "You're so *dense*," he mutters over the tape measure pressed to his chest, "You know we're supposed to be *fiances*? Fiances are meant to spend time together, do everything together? Put two and two together."

Dream glares from underneath his lashes, stirring the gross herb-juice and milk mixture in his cup. "Still, the wedding's not for a few months."

George sighs, allowing the length of his arm to be measured. "A suit of great quality takes time to be crafted. Not to mention, design. A royal wedding calls for perfection in every aspect, including attire."

Dream rolls his eyes, mimicking the fancy words silently to himself. "We should have green suits. None of that classy black bullshit," George glares at his *vulgar words*, as he so puts it, "That's overdone. Green is a great color, and it looks even greater on *me*."

George looks thoroughly annoyed, which Dream pats himself on the back for. "I can't see green," he mumbles.

"What do you mean you can't *see green*?"

George lifts his arms, the tape measure circling his waist. "I'm colorblind."

Dream blinks. "Wow, that explains a lot."

George's eyes dart over to him, hard and challenging. "What does that mean?"

Dream hides his smile behind the rim of his cup. "Why you're so uptight."

George's eyes immediately drift away, gaze blank. He says nothing.

"What does green look like, then?" Dream asks.

George's face remains composed. "Yellow."

"So my eyes are yellow?"

George pauses for a moment, dropping his arms and letting his leg be measured. "Yes."

Dream leans back in his seat, only then noticing his eager posture. "Huh. What colors can you see, then?"

"Yellow," George answers calmly, "And blue."

"What's your favorite color?"

George's eyes remain shallow. "Blue," he says simply, "I don't know why you think that's why I'm..." he clears his throat, "Uptight. It's always been this way for me, I know no different."

Dream rolls his eyes. "Okay, first of all, it was a joke," he defends, earning a puzzled glance from George, "Second of all, I just love color. Can't imagine life without it."

George steps down from his podium, glaring at that comment. "Your turn," is all he says.

"My turn?" Dream repeats, "I just got measured, like, a week ago."

George takes a seat beside him, gracefully picking up his own teacup where it laid abandoned on a small table. "It's a different designer. Go."

Dream sighs, smoothing his hands over his thighs as he rises from the plush sofa, his tea left to run cold on the table. And as much as Dream despises George, in all his despicable glory and ugly words, he has to admit. The boy is *hot* when he means business.

Chapter End Notes

Heyyy I hope you enjoyed this chapter! I don't have a schedule for when I will post chapters, it sort of depends on how easy the chapters are to write and how busy I am, but I will do my best to post the next one by next weekend? Thank you for reading, and leave a kudos if you want :)

You're lovely, xo <3

Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets

Chapter Summary

We're getting cottage core, we're getting fairy meadow, we're getting royal tea party, we're getting...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream's hands are clasped behind his back in *dread*. He cranes his neck to survey the villainous mansion and its sinister windows, crooked roof shingles, and wicked pillars. The door is long and slender, jet black with a golden door-knocker and handles. Dream sighs in defeat, taking a step forward and raising a steady, pale hand to rap the glittering 'U' against the door.

As he waits for an answer, Dream greets the flower bushes framing the path leading to the house. Vermillion petals peek out from deep green and twisted leaves. Unease winds through Dream's veins, something sticky and black spoiling them. A sickness he received from the spirit of the house.

The door swings open, and Dream twirls around to find an unfamiliar gentleman in a plum waistcoat.

"Good evening, sir," he announces smoothly, eyes tinted with a silent question. Dream scrunches his nose at *sir*.

"Um, hello, I," he clears his throat, glancing around anxiously, "I'm...here for George? It's—I'm...I'm Dream." he offers.

The man nods, clearing the doorway and extending an arm into the house. "Please, come in."

Dream takes a wary step inside, instantly taking in the interior of the house whose exterior is such a menacing one.

It's rather plain, Dream hates to admit. Most of the walls are bare, painted a simple cream or scarlet. The stairs are grand, of course, with mahogany wooden steps and ebony railings. They curve into the second level, disappearing down a long and eerie hallway. The entrance doesn't give much away about the house but Dream peeks through wide doorways, met with a faraway violet parlor room and a grand study. The mysterious atmosphere of the house makes his skin crawl.

"Mr. Harrison should be out shortly, you're welcome to wait here for his arrival," the man explains kindly. Dream pulls his eyes away from a tall, empty wall to peer puzzledly at him.

"Is Mr. Harrison, George?" he asks, his tone holding a hint of distaste.

The man seems to be holding back a smile, his lips pursed and tugged inwards. "Yes, sir."

Dream only nods, glancing away to study the house again, which sends the man scurrying away.

Dream finds himself waiting for much longer than the man made it sound like he would. He stands

awkwardly beside the door, which belittles his height, makes him appear minuscule. He drums his fingers restlessly against his thigh, which is coated in emerald fabric. A delicate, pure white shirt hangs loosely off of his shoulders, the unruly fabric scolded into place when it disappears into his waistband, a tawny belt on display. His sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, the first couple buttons popped and revealing his collarbones.

The house is creepily silent, the cold and heavy air piercing Dream's skin and drumming at his ears. He waits, and waits, and waits. But George never waltzes down the staircase like a giddy princess, and Dream grows more anxious by the second.

It sends more tar seeping through Dream's veins, and his eyes bounce from door to door hoping for *some* signal of life in the ghost town of a home. Even the man who greeted him at the door has disappeared entirely. Dream stands completely alone, his thoughts jumping to all sorts of places.

When Dream finally pushes off of the wall, smoothes out his posture and glares at the quiet house, he's not sure how long he's been waiting. But as it is, he has places to be, parties to get to, and he can't leave without a George on his arm. So he takes a step forward, headed toward the staircase with a set jaw.

He climbs the steps as quietly as he can manage, doing his best not to disrupt the desolate and petrifying atmosphere. He swallows thickly with each progression upward, one fist clenched and the other wrapped tightly around the railing. When he reaches the top, he peers down each end of the hallway before deciding to start down the right.

He knows it's probably strange, and definitely impolite, sneaking through someone else's house like this. Especially when it's someone he hardly knows. However, he decides, what's more impolite is that George is late and Dream was left on his own in a frightening and unfamiliar house. So he continues, actions justified in his own mind. Which is all that matters.

He peeks into each room he passes but none hold a strange boy and none hold life at all, really. The first door leads to a study, this one smaller than the one Dream saw downstairs, but grand nonetheless. The second door exposes a plain and ivory bedroom, which he's sure is home to no one. The third door is also a bedroom, this one a sad, powder blue theme but with just the same amount of loneliness as the previous one.

Dream passes *eight* rooms (he kept track, because what the fuck is the point of having so many rooms when clearly *no one* lives in this sad excuse of a home) before he reaches one with life. A sliver of soft light cascades out of a crack in the doors, landing in a frayed pool on the shadowy floor of the hallway. Dream steps carefully around it, planning to simply peek inside and move on to the tenth room in the hallway, but he's stopped short.

He finds George seeped in warm sunlight. He looks gorgeous, obviously, clad in bronze pants and a pearly turtleneck. His hair is swept in beautiful, silky waves. But his skin, the skin of his cheeks and the tip of his nose, is bit a soft red. And his eyes are heavy, weighted by thick tears that he wipes away as they come, a small handkerchief tucked into his fragile hand.

Dream stares, startled and lost. George is the most alive Dream has ever seen him. Open, and falling apart. Hurt, broken, and torn by tears and Dream finds himself choking on air, lungs empty.

It's tragic, a melancholy painting of life that Dream can't look away from. The soft, mint shade of the wall envelops George's shivering body, his normally poised and perfect face wrecked by pain. It's absurd, how drastically different this George looks, how he seems to be a real boy. Everything that he kept in the tight capsules of his eyes is drawn to the surface, like it all exploded in a show of soft pink hues that landed on his skin, shimmering diamond droplets that settled on his lash line,

shudders and sobs that poured from his lips.

The thing is, Dream's never been very good in these situations, has never known how to comfort people. So he takes the easiest option, swallows his guilt and fear and smoothes out his features in preparation, ready to pretend.

He knocks probably too aggressively on the door before bursting inside, announcing himself with a, "Your house is fucking terrifying!"

George twists around immediately, eyes startled and still tainted with red cracks in shiny porcelain. He blinks the tears away but the evidence is still there, and it reminds Dream of the first time he met George.

"What are you doing here?" he asks *far* too smoothly, arms wrapped around his stomach and face blank, blank, blank. Dream swallows his unease.

"I'm supposed to escort you to the garden party, remember?"

George shakes his head, turning around to grab a tie from his bed and discard it in his dresser, perhaps just so he can hide his face, "I know, I meant what are you doing in my room?" he asks lowly.

"I was waiting for fucking *ever*, we're going to be late—" he clears his throat as George faces him again, his irises shattered glass, "Are you—is something wrong?"

George's frown deepens and he studies Dream silently for a moment. "What...what do you mean?"

Well, *fine*. If he's going to be like that. Dream was going to try to be a decent person, but *clearly*, George doesn't want it.

Dream exhales wearily. "Nothing. Are you ready?"

George begins charging toward the door before Dream even finishes his sentence, leaving the room void besides Dream and a small, "Yes."

They step into a carriage (what the fuck ever) in complete silence, Dream occasionally stealing sideways glances at George. But he's always *blank*. His eyes never stray from the window and his lips never flinch from their stiff line. It's *maddening*, and Dream has to chew his lip to keep from asking for an explanation.

Their destination is a foreign meadow. The thin but plentiful blades of grass carry dewdrops that sparkle in bright sunlight. Flowers dance across the field, blush, periwinkle, and soft yellow petals ruffled by a light breeze. Dainty white garden tables hold short tablecloths, a light butterscotch shade of smooth fabric. Plaid cushioned chairs of a similar color make dents in the field. The tables are adorned with lace placemats and ceramic plates brushed with a delicate floral pattern. They're, of course, framed by silverware, and a carefully folded napkin is placed on top. Candles are lit on each table despite the broad daylight, and beside each shimmering teacup is a name card.

There's a small, charming bar that people have already gathered around and a quaint table with smiling delicacies. The whole scene is framed by fairy lights strung across poles, which are lit and pouring warm light over faces, and shadowed by canopies of leaves from nearby trees.

As soon as the two step out of the *ridiculous means of travel*, Dream offers his hand, keeping up his end of the deal. George's eyes remain forward as he takes it easily, lacing their fingers together. His hand is small and frail against Dream's, but the solidity of his grasp makes up for it. They start

toward the array of pretty tables, a picturesque couple with no quarrels.

They brush past numerous tables hand in hand, searching for the one that holds their names in a golden and curling font. Both remain quiet, an unspoken agreement between them. Before they have the chance to find their designated seats, they're stopped by curious, dark eyes garbed in perfect tea party attire.

"There you are," George's mother calls, voice shrill, Dream's mother following close behind. Dream isn't oblivious to the way her smile grows when her eyes flick downward, catch on the gesture Dream is trying so desperately to ignore.

"Where were you two, we were just about to start without you?" Dream's mother coos.

George instantly springs into action, painting on a kind smile. "I'm so sorry, it was my fault, really," he declares in a way that would instantly soothe any angry wrinkles, charming and sweet, "I was caught up in choosing the perfect attire, you know how I get so fixed on those things."

Dream knows it's a lie, but he forces a tight smile, nodding along.

"Oh, that's alright," Dream's mother insists, swatting a hand at him. "You look stunning," she adds cheerily.

They end up dragged to their table by the pair, and as Dream sits before the card that reads his name he notes the presence of his father and the absence of George's.

Dream leans toward his left, close enough so he can murmur lowly as to only be heard by one ear. "Where's your dad?"

George's cold eyes flick over to Dream before they slip away, finding the empty seat and the card that reads *Monty*.

"He was unavailable," he answers simply, folding his napkin over his lap. Dream surveys the place setting across the small table.

"Looks like they planned for him," he challenges.

"It was short notice," George snaps firmly, voice sharp. Dream retreats, grabbing his own napkin with regretful eyes.

They're served their tea first. Dream is getting really sick and tired of tea. He watches as steaming liquid is poured into an ivory cup, the rim lined with gold and the center decorated with a wispy, dancing cornflower. He adds milk to the cup, the satiny cream swirling in dark liquor.

"What the fuck is this shit," he mutters as soon as he takes his first sip, nose scrunched. George glares, taking a delicate sip of his own.

"You're not supposed to curse in formal settings."

Dream rolls his eyes, setting his cup down in distaste. "Sorry. What is this putrid drink, please, it tastes of scat."

George glares once more. "It's tea."

Their plates are soon touched by some cracker-mush experiment. Dream tosses it down his throat in one swift motion. When he complains, asks for the real food, George simply tells him the next

course is in fifteen minutes. Dream didn't realize meals called for a schedule now, but what can you expect from a bunch of snooty, high-maintenance hyenas.

If there's one thing about the evening that sparks Dream's attention, it's the silence of the boy beside him. George doesn't engage effortlessly and intensely in the conversation at the table how he normally would. He doesn't toss laughs into the air or juggle different degrees of a fake smile. He doesn't nod enthusiastically, comment with posh words. He remains mostly quiet, simply watching from his seat at the lively table. He keeps his hands folded in his lap and he keeps his eyes shallow. Yet they somehow hold the weight of the world.

It's so *different*, from how George would normally act. And Dream grows impatient.

"Do you think I could grab a drink from the bar without anyone noticing?" he comments, just hoping to fill the silence on their half of the table. George shakes his head.

"We've only got three more minutes," he answers simply.

Dream sighs, scanning the setting around them, the full tables. "How do you do these sober?" he half-jokes.

"I just don't like alcohol," George replies, always too literal.

Dream glances over at him with a kind smile, but George keeps his eyes forward. "I doubt that."

George says nothing, eyes remaining blank and lips remaining in a stubborn line. He fidgets with the corner of his placemat, runs his delicate fingers over the delicate material. Dream gives in, gives up, exhaling loudly in defeat.

"Are you okay?" he asks quietly, his heartbeats unruly. George, of course, remains still, never revealing anything.

"Why wouldn't I be?" he challenges, voice flat.

Dream grows frustrated, huffing a "George," before he attempts to calm his seething veins. He manages to keep his voice smooth. "I saw you crying."

George visibly flinches at that, which is progress from his poised stature. "I don't need your concern," he declares simply.

Dream feels the flames crawling back in, watches George with a cold gaze *begging* him to show some sign of life, of *humanity*. To at least look at Dream. He's a sculpture carved from shattered glass and bruising shadows.

"What's your *deal*," he hisses, still incredibly aware of the chattering lips belonging to strict faces ahead of them. "Why can't you just—just *let* yourself be human."

George *somehow* keeps his face composed, minus the flicker in his eyes that Dream catches. The words hit deep somewhere, sparked something in the infuriating maze of George's conscience.

"I don't know why you care so much," he states.

Because I can see you're driving yourself mad. Because I see you're where I was. Because I felt what you're feeling.

He can't exactly say that to a stranger.

Because I know you.

He shouldn't. George is a stranger.

At Dream's silence George turns, eyes narrowed and so *full*. He sees every crack and dark crevice, every ounce of pain, every wilting flower. His voice, however, sends shards of glass through Dream's skin.

"Let me make this much clear, Dream," he breathes, voice spoiled, icy. "I don't exactly like you either. I don't like your prying words or your curious eyes. I don't like how you think you have everything all figured out. Your—your *ideas*, whatever you think you have figured out about me, you're wrong. Spare me your advice, Dream. Life isn't one size fits all. You may be able to say all that you want, do all that you want—*carry* yourself the way that you want without having to pay mind to how others feel about it, but our situations are entirely different."

Dream writhes under the scrutiny of George's critical eyes. They're dark, thick syrup sticking to the inside of Dream's skin and turning his body heavy, weighing him down. Sliding down his throat and stealing his words. He chokes.

A collection of plates landing on the table disrupts the suffocating silence, followed by a faint, shrill voice.

"Is everything alright?" George's mother asks, finally noting the tension across from her.

In an instant, George's face becomes distant, contorts back into a polite smile that to Dream feels nightmarish, grim. George places a gentle hand on Dream's bicep as his eyes pour lulling honey into his audience.

"Everything's perfect," he assures them so convincingly Dream nearly believes him. Then he's facing Dream, removing his hand only to slip it upwards, clutch Dream's chin and ghost his thumb over frowning lips. Dream inwardly shudders, his eyes surely wide in horror. George sends him a look that has Dream smoothing out his features. "Right, Darling?" George asks.

He *hates* it, being the victim of George's secret but *not-so-secret-to-Dream* weapon, the one that instantly schools anyone into tranquility. The one that up until now, he only saw used from afar. Never experienced it firsthand. It makes him nauseous.

"Right."

For the rest of the evening, they pretend. Of course, George does it best. He'll entwine their fingers together over the table, wipe a crumb from the edge of Dream's lips with the tip of his thumb, lean into Dream's side when laughing at something Dream never understands. And Dream just follows numbly, allows George to act and use him as his prop.

The powder blue sky slips into a violent heather dusted with wispy brushstrokes of clouds. It sends vicious shadows over the meadow, leaves the scenery only illuminated by candlelight and droplets of twinkling lightbulbs. The once comforting breeze grows slightly stronger, bites their skin pink. Dream sips wearily at his tea, fingers clasping gently at the porcelain handle while his eyes are painted with dusk.

Their plates fell empty long ago, most stood and crowded around the bar once more, conversing merrily. The chairs around Dream sit vacantly, waiting and mocking. Dream just swirls his tea in its cup, watches the pale liquid slosh against ivory walls, tinted with moonlight.

"You're not going to join us?" a dignified voice asks, somewhere far and behind Dream. "You were

so desperate for a drink before."

Dream wishes he could ignore the question, too drained to answer, wishes he could disappear into the shadowy edges of the venue. As it is, he still has *some* dignity left, and that would be rather embarrassing.

"No," is all he says, the word plain.

He watches shimmering blades of grass, attempts to match his breaths with the swaying jade leaves of a willow tree.

"I don't know why you're angry," George declares calmly, "You don't like me, either."

Dream shakes his head, the gesture barely noticeable. "I'm not."

"Then why are you sulking?"

"I'm not."

"You're being bitter."

Dream twists around to glare over his shoulder. "Maybe I just want a moment without your royal hands all over me." It's partly true.

George exhales, eyes flicking to the side. "We *agreed*—"

"Yes, I know we *agreed*, but it's still weird," he bites back, "Don't you find it the *least* bit uncomfortable?"

George folds his arms over his chest. "It's business."

Dream scoffs, instantly recoiling and turning around again. "Whatever. I forgot you're a *robot*," he spits.

He soon hears the dull retreat of footsteps against soft grass, and he knows he's alone again.

Dream constantly finds himself trapped under high ceilings, he realizes, staring at an especially high one. This ceiling fades into fierce archways and crystalline windows, stares at shiny wooden floors.

"To be clear," Dream states, eyes still surveying the large, open room. "I'm dreading this far more than you are."

George begins marching forward toward the center of the room, his motions swift. "That's alright."

Dream chases after him with slick strides and his hands stuffed into his pockets in defiance.

Dream watches as George's arms sway beside him, the brass wrapped around his slender fingers glinting in the overhead lighting (Dream will *not* acknowledge the chandelier). George is small. He's short, his shoulders are narrow, his waist is thin. But the way he carries himself, bold posture

and a poised chin, makes his smaller build almost unnoticeable.

They reach the center of the barren floor, the room deserted entirely minus Dream, George, and one other man.

He's stout, taller than George but shorter than Dream. He sports a goatee and already judgemental eyes, grey and narrow. He wears ratty, thin hair and a white t-shirt and ebony dress pants combination. From where he currently stands, feet parted slightly and hands rubbing together, he studies Dream and George. It's sort of unsettling, but George seems to remain unbothered.

He extends a hand and plasters on a charming smile. "George, sir."

The man doesn't take his hand. He only narrows his eyes further and rasps out a greeting that consists of, "George. Twirl."

At that, George is taken aback. He blinks, hesitates slightly and almost withdraws his hand. "Sorry?"

"*Twirl*," the man repeats.

George exhales a frustrated breath but pulls his hand away. Then he twirls in an awkward circle. Dream has to chew at his lip to keep from laughing.

The man is silent for a moment, simply watches as George comes to a stop after one full rotation. His disapproving gaze is unwavering. "Huh," he grunts. Then he turns to Dream, studies him. "And you?"

Without hesitation nor instruction, Dream begins twirling, biting back a smile. "I'm Dream," he says halfway.

He comes to a stop in the same position he started, pinched eyes on him. Dream simply clasps his hands together in front of his lap, a small grin threatening his composed expression.

"You two," the man begins after a silent moment, "Have very different builds. Which will make this slightly more difficult, but we'll manage." Then he's taking a step toward George, clasping hands around his shoulders. George looks visibly uncomfortable, and confused. "You're petite," the man announces, "Gentle body. Yeah?" He releases George, stalking toward Dream instead. "And you're quite tall. Strong build and lanky limbs."

He slips away from their reach, turning his back toward them to jot something down on a notepad. George's startled eyes stray toward Dream, who merely grins in delight.

"Alright!" the man announces suddenly, swiveling around once more and clapping his hands together. "I think I'm missing something." His eyes flick between the two boys, scouring and prying.

"Sorry?" George asks.

"You're getting married, right?" the man inquires.

George blinks. "Well, yes."

The man purses his lips. "You're awfully," he gestures toward the gap of space between them, "Distant."

Dream and George simply wait for further explanation.

The man arches a brow, leaning forward and splaying his hands out toward them. "Hello? What am I missing? Aren't fiances supposed to be, like," he waves a hand in the air, "Lovey-dovey? Where's the gooey stuff? What am I supposed to work with?"

Dream answers before George has the chance to. "We're not exactly—" he searches for the right words but decides that simplicity is best, "This is an arranged marriage. We sort of just met. Like, a few weeks ago."

The man's hands clap over his eyes and he releases a groan of agony. "Oh my god."

"Is that a problem?" George wonders, brows knitted together.

The man drops his hands but keeps his eyes down, smooths his palms over his hips. He sighs dramatically. "We just have a bit of work to do. Alright," he lifts his head, starting toward the two again and waving his hands at them, "Come on, we don't have all day."

"Pardon?"

"Ugh," the man grabs a handful of each of their shoulders, shoving them together, "Get your hands on each other, *please*."

Dream's hands fall to George's waist before he can think it over, clutching his soft shape gently. George seems startled, blinking manically, but his hands reach up to wrap over Dream's shoulders. He seems loose, comfortable, which Dream didn't expect from someone as uptight as George but he supposes it's just *business*.

"Okay," the man readjusts George's hand placement so they're wrapping around Dream's neck instead. Then he pushes Dream forward, closing the nearly foot-wide gap so it's only a few inches. "Before we get started with the actual choreography I need to fix you guys."

"Fix us?" George inquires.

The man sighs as if George has just asked the most ridiculous question in the world. "This dance is going to be after you've just got married. As in, *a celebration of love*? It's not going to work if you two are stiff as boards around each other."

Dream glances from the man before him down to George, who stares at the man in astonishment. They remain still, simply wrapped around each other and only a breath apart.

"Now," the man waves his hands at them, "Do something."

George clears his throat, turning his eyes toward Dream. His gaze is hesitant, calculating. They still remain stationary, simply watching each other and waiting for someone to make the first move.

"Loosen up!" the man instructs, "Move! Your feet! Something! Twirl!"

At that, a golden, honeyed smile spreads over Dream's face and he twirls them around, George's eyes widening in surprise at the sudden movement.

"Thank you!"

They come to a stop, George's face hard, which has Dream spinning them again. He has so much control in this moment, just to annoy George as much as he wants. But as he starts their third spin, a

sharp heel lands in his toe.

"Woah!" the man reprimands. Dream attempts to hold back his smile, amused at George's reaction.

He can make George step out of line. Spoil his perfect prince procedure. Unwind him.

"George, George," the man says, calmer, "We're loosening up. We're growing closer. Try again."

George simply sends Dream a tight smile, scolding him. Dream uses it to fuel him.

He yanks George dramatically to the right, side-stepping and George mirrors. Then he pulls him backward, and to the left. George's eyes are narrowed, challenging. Dream's grip tightens on his waist, one hand slipping up to grab the one clawing at his neck. He laces their fingers together, holding their clutched hands out just beside their shoulders. Then he twirls them again, this time twice without stopping.

"Lord!" Dream hears suddenly. His eyes flick away to the man with his hands clasped over his face, shaking his head. "This is awful! It's worse than I thought, it's—it's impossible," he begins starting toward the door, slamming his notepad against the floor, "Foul, horrible, how does my boss expect me to—"

And then he's gone, disappearing out the door and his tantrum with him.

"That was your fault," George declares. Dream's eyes dart toward him, a hint of amusement webbed in his irises. He shrugs.

"It was worth it," he glances toward the door once more, "I kind of like that guy."

"And I thought you would be a good dancer," George hums, ignoring Dream's comments entirely. Dream meets his eyes again.

"What do you mean?"

George shrugs, pursing his lips. "I expected you to be more graceful. But with those lanky legs—" he sighs, shaking his head, and Dream's eyes narrow at the faint glow in George's irises, "You're like a giraffe."

"I am a good dancer."

George scrunches his nose, shakes his head again, "You're clumsy. And your movements are too jerky."

Dream scoffs. "Didn't know you were a dance snob."

George shrugs. "What can I s—"

He's cut off by Dream throwing him outwards by their interlocked hands, George out by his side and glaring. Dream smiles devilishly, pulling him inwards once more and wrapping him in his arm. He lowers George into his second arm, dipping him low over the floor.

"How'd I do?" Dream asks with glimmering eyes. George squints at him. He looks even smaller cradled in Dream's arms, dark hair dusting his forehead and lips pressed into a thin line.

"Think you'll have to try harder."

Dream lifts him again, places his hand back on his waist. They dance easily, smoothly for a

moment, Dream studying George as George's eyes dare him. And then a lightbulb sparks in his mind.

For a moment, he forgets what they are to each other. He forgets that their relationship so far has been hate, that he despises George. So he follows through with his plan easily.

He lifts the hand that holds George's above their heads, twirling George on his own for a moment, before his hand slips downward. It wraps George in his arm once again, more firmly this time. And this time George is pressed close, his upper back just barely reaching Dream's chest. Dream's other hand falls easily to George's waist, the touch featherlight, holding him there against Dream.

He hears George's breath hitch, and it spurs Dream on. He drags his lips down until they're just hovering beside George's ear, breathing hot over his skin. He can just barely see George's eyes, thick eyelashes blinking over caramel, trained straight ahead of him. He's so near, warm and *real*, it makes Dream dizzy.

Dream keeps his voice low, a crushed velvet whisper. "What about now?"

There's a silent moment. Dream waits for something, a scolding, an awkward attempt of a tension-relieving comment, a far too literal response.

"Lovely!"

Dream twists around, heart leaping. His hands fall away from George and he takes a wobbly step backward, staring with wide eyes at the ratty man announcing himself with open arms.

"I knew it would work! That was adorable, really. Now we can get started!"

Dream sits in the midst of a *taunting* pile of impending doom. There are mounds upon mounds of thick binders and heavy stacks of paper all grinning like a Cheshire Cat at Dream. He sips at a particularly distasteful cup of tea, glaring back at the load.

The people around him—two sets of sinister parents, George with a creased forehead, a lady introduced as their wedding planner, and her assistant—flick studiously through countless pages, discussing each and every possible option (it seems) with each other, while Dream pretends to listen and pretends to care. They discuss themes, color palettes, decor, music, delicacies, and so on and so on.

Dream leans over to the boy sat beside him on a ridiculous velvet sofa, keeping his voice low. "Why am I here again?" he hisses.

"You're *supposed* to be approving options," George answers flatly, eyes trained on the brunette explaining table settings far too enthusiastically.

Dream pauses, tuning in for a moment only to hear "Golden napkin rings would be classy, while silver would be mature," and immediately tuning out again. He shifts on the sofa.

"Right. Well, no offense, I know this is sort of *our* wedding and all," he murmurs, "But I don't really care. And you guys seem to be doing an excellent job on your own, so, if you don't mind—"

He attempts to stand but inevitably, George places a disapproving hand over his thigh, sending a tight smile toward curious eyes across the room. He turns inward toward Dream.

"You can't leave," he insists through gritted teeth, still attempting to keep his face light for wandering eyes.

"Why not?" Dream mutters, irked.

"It's *our wedding*."

Dream raises his hands in defense, "And I trust you to make all the right decisions. Honestly, I would be more of a burden than I would be help. You seriously want me constantly making witty remarks in your ear? Gross, right? So I think I'll just be on my way—"

"You're a child," George sits back against the sofa again, arms crossed, "Fine. Go. What do I care."

Dream quirks a brow at him but George keeps his eyes locked on the lady currently elbows deep in a lavender binder.

"Why are you mad?"

George sighs, blinking languidly over hard eyes. "I thought you were leaving."

"You're mad. I thought you wouldn't want me here anyway?" Dream continues.

"I'm not *mad*. You're just obnoxious and incredibly insufferable."

Dream shakes his head. "What's the problem?"

George's eyes flick over to him, cold yet burning. "I just wish you'd carry some of the weight for once."

Dream frowns. "What?"

"George?"

Both turn suddenly, meeting the raven eyes of George's mother. Dream realizes everyone in the small, dim room is turned toward them.

"Why don't you two take it outside?" George's mother encourages lightly, "You won't miss too much."

There's a tight, silent moment, and Dream considers standing and announcing that he was just about to leave anyway. But George beats him to the punch, drawing himself from the scarlet cushion and smoothing his hands over his suit.

"Right. My apologies for disrupting." He turns to Dream, sending him a demanding look that has Dream rising from the couch as well. George grabs him by the elbow, more forceful than affectionate, and drags him toward the door.

They burst into the open air of a long hallway, soft, iridescent light falling in streams through crystal windows and dancing on shiny floors. Dream instantly turns a questioning eye to George, ready to prod an explanation out of him. But George stands with his back to Dream, arms crossed tight over his chest.

"George?" Dream tries, peeking around in an attempt to catch a glimpse of George's expression.

George turns around, his arms falling from his chest as he motions a hand toward the end of the hallway. "You can go, then. Now's your chance."

The caramel of his irises is soaked in rich orange flames. Dream stares, a little lost. "What—what did you mean?"

George's eyes narrow. "What?" he spits back, shaking his head slightly.

"You—" Dream sighs, smoothing out the frown in his face and soothing the tension in his voice, "What do you mean, you wish I'd carry some of the weight?"

George glances away, balling his hands into fists. "Nothing," he murmurs.

"Tell me, George."

He exhales resolutely, scowl still prominent. "I do *everything*."

Dream blinks, waits for further explanation. And George gives it to him.

"I plan our parties, pick out the decor, the food, make sure everything goes well. I'm always the one covering for us when we're caught fighting and I'm the one who has to practically force you to be the *least* bit affectionate and I'm the one making sure that to everyone else, this relationship looks perfect. And—and where were you, at the first meeting? You just skipped, because it didn't meet your standards of interest, or—or importance? I was waiting, Dream. I thought maybe you could help? Just pick out the—the flowers, or the location. I—" he stares at the floor, drawing in a raggedy breath, "I just have a lot on my to-do list, right now, so if you could..." he finally meets Dream eyes again, his own determined and demanding, "Do something. Help, *please*."

Dream pauses, barely breathing, still letting the word sink in. Then he glances at the floor, shadows cast over his eyes.

"You're just so good at it," he mumbles.

George sighs, taking a step back to lean against the wall and let his eyes slip closed. "Dream—"

"I didn't think you needed me," Dream admits, wringing his hands, "I didn't think you *wanted* me to, to just mess up all your stuff, and—" he frowns at the floor, "I don't know. I'm not good at that part of it all. And you," he lets a small smile slip, meeting George's eyes and his blank face, "You're quite the businessman. Sort of put me to shame, but," he exhales, blinking at the floor once more, "But I'm sorry," he finishes quietly.

George glances away, down the end of the hallway that doesn't hold Dream, hiding. His voice is small, but holds the weight of the room. Holds a silent change, maybe. Sends something coursing through Dream's veins.

"Thank you."

Chapter End Notes

Fine, I'll give you a smidgel of fluff with that dancing scene.

Hii I hope you enjoyed the chapter, I'm honestly surprised I was able to finish it in 2 days? But I guess I'm just really excited about this fic so, I have lots planned. (Also, sort of fell in love with the dance instructor character. (He'll be back)) Leave a kudos if you want, thank you for reading!

You're lovely xo :)))

Turning Tables

Chapter Summary

Drum roll, please.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Unfortunately no, Dream. We have plans tomorrow night."

Dream groans, sat upon heaps of ripe, gold-dripping delicacies, reaching out for his glass of rich, crimson wine. He swirls it in its crystal trap, squinting at the thin liquid.

"You're included."

"What?" Dream asks over the rim of his glass, "And you're only telling me now? Kind of short notice, don't you think?"

His mother sends him eyes that scold him for his poor manners as his father continues. "We didn't plan on taking you until yesterday evening. When Monty called."

"Huh?"

Dream's father pops a chunk of meat into his mouth, chewing slowly while Dream waits, glares in anticipation. Then he clears his throat, dabs the corner of his lips with a maroon napkin, and smooths his hands over his lap.

"The Emersons are hosting an event. And as partners and good friends of theirs, we were invited. Originally, only your mother and I planned on attending," he explains, voice velvet and rumbling. "It's a masquerade ball at their brand new estate."

Dream quirks a brow. "No offense to the Emersons, but a *masquerade ball*?" That receives a silencing glare from his mother.

"Point is, the Harrisons also happen to be of good relations with the Emersons, and were also invited. When Monty heard we were on the guest list, he suggested that you take George as your date."

Fuck Monty and his antics.

Dream swallows, licks sweet wine from his lips. "Do I really need a date?"

"Dream," his mother extends a hand over the table, "I thought you would be happy to take George?"

Dream blinks. *Right.*

"Right." Dream pauses, wondering what exactly his mother thinks their relationship is. "I just...would much rather stay home. Y'know?"

Dream's father shakes his head. "I've already told Monty you agreed."

God fucking damn i—

"Oh. Well, what about my attire? I don't exactly have a bedazzled mask lying around."

Dream's mother smiles pleasantly. "We had one made for you, paid extra for it to be done by tomorrow morning. However, you'll have to pick a suit from your closet, I'm afraid."

Lovely.

"Lovely," Dream declares, taking another swig of wine.

This time, it's Dream who greets George at the door. *Returning the favor*, he supposes.

He's stood at the edge of the venue, where the shadows begin, watching people swirl across mahogany floors. *Maybe* a chandelier hangs over their heads, and maybe it sprinkles holographic light over the vast room. The walls are made up of tall windows, the world beyond them set in darkness from an indigo sky. Silver moonlight dances through the windows, past open, velvet curtains. Two curling staircases frame the entrance to the room, greet anyone who strides through the door. Placed around the edges of the room are pots of crimson roses, narrow candles hung against walls. A grand, ivory piano sits in a far corner, sweet and satiny music cascading from it into the happy, perfume-tinted air.

The guests are dressed in the best of the best. There are large, billowing skirts of shimmering dresses. Silk or lace gloves snake up the milky skin of slender arms. Pearls brush upon collarbones or wrists, and hair is pinned into all sorts of patterns. Others wear polished and pressed suits, slick collars on display. Some hold slim, graceful ties and others hold smiling bows, a few even bare. Handkerchiefs are tucked into pockets, chunky cuff links weigh down wrists, and twinkling rings trap snobby, spoiled fingers.

Each face is graced with a mask, some held by sticks and others tied firmly around the owner's head. They all shimmer, and they all express wealth and high class.

Dream is adorned in a classic black tux, the sleek jacket buttoned around his waist. His collar is empty and the first button is popped open, revealing the strong line of his neck. He flaunts glistening rings that weigh down his knuckles and his thick silver watch. Propped against the upper half of his face is a smooth, silver and narrow mask. Engraved in the steel along the edges of the mask are delicate swirls.

And so Dream stands alone, a glass of rose clutched to his stomach. And each time the door swings open, announcing a new guest, he turns to it hoping to find a familiar vacant face. His neck is beginning to hurt, to be quite honest, but finally, *finally*, he finds what he's been looking for.

It's a little endearing, the way George stands appearing small and clueless when he first steps inside, narrow shoulders framed by the towering doorway. He glances around, surveying the area, never noticing Dream who stares at him in what might be awe from afar. George is gorgeous, obviously, he always is. But something about the way the light catches on the shape of his jaw and his starlight dusted cheekbones, the way his eyes *glow*, bright even through the mask and the dim

lighting, the soft cushions of his lips painted pink and innocent, the gentle wave of his dark hair brushed over the pale skin of his forehead. It does something to enunciate his beauty.

Dream sets his glass down on a lonely table and begins striding carefully toward him, taking in George's attire. He wears a dark spruce suit, a warm cream button-up peeking out from underneath. His collar remains empty as well, but his knuckles hold the same brass rings he normally sports. Dream's gaze catches on his mask, the design of it split in half. On one side, the material is ivory and holds elegant cracks. The other side is gold and shimmering.

Dream slows to a stop when he reaches George, the boy's eyes dragging away from a cluster of roses to greet Dream.

"Hello," Dream says absently, staring down at George. George's brows lower slightly, eyes narrowing.

"Hello."

"Why are you frowning?" Dream blurts without thinking. George's eyebrows lift but his eyes smile slightly.

"I think the last time you properly greeted me was when we first met," George answers.

Dream blinks, attempting to clear his mind. "O-okay."

George stares, his gaze careful. "Are you alright?"

Dream swallows, extending his palm toward George in an offering. "I'm fine. Come on."

So George takes it and they lace their fingers together naturally, starting toward the room overflowing with pursed lips and judging eyes.

Dream drags them toward the mini-bar (having lost his previous fuel), the one that insists on only supplying their guests with rich pink nectar. So he takes the glass of toxic glitter and tosses it down his throat happily.

"You're seriously not going to have a drink?" Dream asks George, who stands idly while Dream sends poison coursing through his veins. George merely shakes his head. Dream sighs. "For someone so brilliant at being prince," he critiques, "You're really bad at this part."

George squints at him as Dream takes a slow sip, not meeting George's eyes. "What part?"

Dream draws the glass from his lips, replacing it with a small smirk. "This part," he gestures around the room, toward the swaying bodies, "Being surrounded by snooty airheads flaunting excessive jewelry and high on champagne. Dealing with it."

"Dealing with it?" George repeats flatly.

Dream glances at George, eyes light. "We've already decided you're Mr. Businessman," he hums, "Now let me show you what I'm good at."

George glares. "Getting drunk and despising everyone within arm's distance is what you're good at?"

Dream rolls his eyes, "*Fun* is what I'm good at." George simply stares. "*C'mon*, George. For once the party isn't about us, you don't have to be all princely and on your best behavior. Take advantage

of it."

George sighs, eyes drifting to the floor full of waltzing suits and gowns. There's a silent moment, one that drags through Dream's veins beside the alcohol. Then he's grabbing George's hand suddenly and yanking him toward the center of the room, his glass empty and discarded again.

"What are you doing?" George asks frantically, being pulled through a thick crowd by Dream's hand. Dream doesn't answer, simply bursts through the crowd onto the open floor.

He stops somewhere near the center and turns around, George glowering in response. Dream grins back, intertwines their fingers whereas before their palms were simply clasped together. He places his second hand softly against George's waist. He tugs George a step forward and as Dream lifts their hands, leans down to George's ear, and George's hand reaches up to wrap over Dream's shoulder, they click into place.

"Relax, George," Dream murmurs, painting a stripe down George's spine with the tip of his finger before his hand lands back on the smooth fabric by his waist. He feels George loosen ever so slightly. When he pulls back, he finds George's eyes widened, but glowing. The same way they have since the beginning of the night. Dream noticed it before, the way his eyes are clear instead of heavy, bright instead of storming, but he never got to see the full extent of it until now.

They don't match the rest of his face, at all. He doesn't smile the way his eyes do. But it's enough to signal that something is different, something lifted a weight from George's shoulders in some way.

His irises are art. A watercolor biography of what lies beneath George's fake exterior, beyond his phantom smile and slippery, translucent skin. They're honeyed, more golden than they are brown. Dusted with his wounds and scars but rich with authenticity and humanity. Today, the good is more prominent. Evidence of happy memories and real laughs. Real, is what they are. His eyes are real. They're alive.

Dream smiles, a reflection of George's eyes. And then he pulls them into a dance.

"You're ridiculous," George mutters instantly.

"I thought you liked dancing," Dream retorts, grin still fully intact.

George's face remains even, his eyes narrowed slightly and assessing. "Not with you," he hums.

Dream squints at George in challenge, throwing his hand upward to spin George once, twice, three times before catching his hip again. George glares.

"Dream," he warns.

Dream cocks his head to the side, one side of his lips lifting subtly. "What's wrong, sweetheart?"

George's eyes fall into slits. "You're so utterly *obnoxious*—"

He's twirling again, this time only two circles before he's stopped by Dream's giant, gentle hand.

"Immature," George grumbles when he's facing Dream again.

"Fun," Dream corrects.

"I'm not having fun," George counters.

"I doubt you even know what the word means," Dream replies, and it's meant to be lighthearted, expressed lightly, but it seems to hit George hard and Dream sees his eyes beginning to cloud over again. He feels panic rise in his chest. "Hey, I was kidding," he attempts to mend, his eyes pleading.

George's eyes settle somewhere in between, the edges darkened and frosted over while the centers remain soft. He says nothing, mouth stubbornly set in a flat line.

"George," Dream begs, scouring his face and *praying* that it won't close off again, that he won't lose George in this state. "I didn't mean it," he assures him, voice firm.

George exhales, a tiny bit of the tension from his body and face leaving with the breath. He glances away, gazing emptily at the bodies surrounding them. "It's alright," he says lowly. He meets Dream's eyes once again, and it's like he's looking for something.

"What?" Dream blurts out.

George's eyelashes flutter, "What?"

"You look like you want to say something."

Dream loses his eyes again as they dart around the room beyond Dream's shoulder.

"I thought you hated me," George wonders, only earning a silent frown from Dream. "Why do you want to dance with me?"

Dream falls quiet as George's eyes prod at him, waiting for an answer he won't want to hear. Dream's eyes trace the cracks in his mask, the winding veins and pathways before they fall onto the side that shimmers in silent honesty. His gaze slips downward, finding wild, brilliant eyes staring up at him in waiting.

"Dream," his voice is a rich, gentle violence that rushes through Dream's ears and torches his insides, steals his breaths, "Tell me the truth."

Dream can't help the sad smile that peeks through, his eyes painfully earnest. "You seem different today."

George's features turn slightly frightened, silently startled. His grip on Dream weakens.

"You're more real."

"Real?" George repeats, eyes narrowed.

"You're colorful, George."

George stills, ceasing their dance as his hands slip away from Dream. "I don't know what you mean," he murmurs, "You...you want to dance because I'm...I'm *real*?"

"I want to *know* you because you're real."

George's lips part as his brows dip low over starry irises and heavy pupils. "What does that mean," he breathes.

Dream glares at the pit he's dug himself into. He curses his big mouth and his poor self-control. "I...I'm not sure."

George takes a step backward. "Okay. Well, when you figure it out," he takes another step back as his words coat the floor in something sticky, holding Dream in silent suffocation. "Don't bother informing me. I don't need to be fixed and certainly not by you."

All air is swept from the dark chambers of Dream's lungs, his eyes wide in horror and his throat strangled in words he can't get out. George slips away toward the edge of the spotlight as his shadow follows. The words play in a loop in Dream's skull, haunting him. Eventually, he pulls himself from the floor, retreats numbly toward the crowds, and pushes through them once again.

He wants to find George. He knows George doesn't want to be found. He knows somehow he hurt George. He wants to make it right. But it's all a knot of thoughts and feelings and wants and needs and rights and wrongs and it's all tangled into incoherence.

So he wanders aimlessly, following his feet as they follow his heart. He glances at every passing face and every dark corner because *maybe* he'll find the frightened face of a boy he may never get to know. He'll find stubborn eyes beneath two masks, one carefully crafted by the hands of an artist and the other knit by the cold, delicate hands of George himself.

Dream doesn't find George until he's given up.

He's passing oil paintings and pastel masterpieces, eyes set on his feet as they drift over shiny wood. He needs a break from the thick air, polluted by daisy perfume and arrogant words and vain breaths. He's ready to escape the walls that smother him, the ones at fault for his tight throat. He's ready to fall victim to the moon and stars, to do so pliantly. But he collides with a small body as he's about to reach the door.

He glances up immediately, ready to send an elegant wanderer scurrying away with sharp words. But he's stopped short as the figure whirls around, revealing the startled face of the boy he's had marked on his treasure map all evening.

"George," he breathes before he can even form a coherent thought. His eyes quickly flick toward George's hand, wrapped around a golden door handle. "Are you—are you leaving?"

George blinks, his face suddenly blank. "I don't know."

Dream stares for a moment, waiting for George to maybe disappear once more or spit something foul. When he doesn't, Dream reaches out toward the door handle. He tugs George's fingertips off of the cold brass before gently pulling his palm away, letting it fall to George's side. When he looks to George again, the boy is gazing emptily at the floor.

"Don't," Dream pleads.

George raises his head, his eyes suddenly wild. "Why not? So you can analyze me more? Not finished with your little project, yet?"

Dream shakes his head, his expression urgent, "You don't really believe that."

"I believe it because it's true," he declares, his words cutting like sharp wind, "Since the day we met, you've always seen me as a fraction of a human. You told me yourself, Dream."

"What?"

"Robot. *Pinnocchio*," George seethes, "Do you think I'm *dense*, Dream?"

His eyes burn bright, sending something cold dripping down Dream's spine and something hot

splintering through his heart.

"You don't even understand the weight of your words," George breathes, "You don't see how something like that could *hurt* me."

Dream's mind whirrs with endless thoughts, a storm brewing as the walls of his throat cave in.

"Because I'm just a robot, right?" George tears, "Because you know everything. You know me inside and out and you know how to fix it, right?" he shakes his head, jaw tight and eyes roaring, "You know a fraction of the truth."

Dream shakes his head. "I'm *sorry*, George," he begs, "I was just angry, and I—I didn't think, I just took it out on you—"

"I don't want to hear it," George answers lowly, "I want you to leave me alone."

His eyes are dark as they turn toward the door, and as his hand lands on the slender arch of the door handle once more Dream reaches out without thinking, catches the one that lays empty by his side. He laces their fingers together slowly, drags his thumb over the back of George's hand.

"Please," he asks, staring at the contact, "Listen to me, George."

George glances over his shoulder, eyes bewildered and still blazing. "What game are you playing?" he bites, ripping his hand away, "What makes you think I want this? Every little touch, every sweet string of words you spin, every charming smile, it's not going to work. Stop *trying*."

And then he's gone once more, and Dream is left to salvage wilted flowers.

It's rather nauseating, the way Dream stands now with his palm pressed against another, ghostly fingers woven tight through his knuckles. And it's rather obvious, apparently.

"Are you alright, Dream?" his mother asks.

Maybe what's more nauseating is the crystal walls surrounding him, the chairs lined up across the room, the vacant aisle down the center of the floor, and the floral altar he stands before.

"No, not really," Dream murmurs, stealing his hand back and turning away. He feels eyes on him, boring into his back.

"What's the matter?"

Dream closes his eyes, attempts to placate his mind, "I think something upset my stomach," he answers, "From brunch. I'll be right back."

He slinks away toward the exit at the end of the aisle. He stumbles through a small, trapped hallway, reaching desperately for the door.

He meets a stretch of vibrant, emerald green grass and dancing willow trees. A glimmering lake sits at the edge of the field, reflecting the sky and its soft blue color, flaunting tranquil clouds. He takes a step toward it, ripping his jacket off to meet ripe wintry air. His lungs feel all but full as the

water grows nearer, his chest strangled. Rocks and pebbles line the shore. Dream remembers the faint wonderings of his childhood friends, "*What if rocks are soft, but when we touch them they tense up.*" He smiles, picking one from the ground and spinning it in his hand as a new-found wave of air rushes down his throat.

He tosses the rock toward the lake, where it skips three times before it sinks below the surface and drowns.

He shouldn't care as much as he does, really. He shouldn't repeat the same, burning sentences over and over in his head. It shouldn't matter because it's George and Dream doesn't like George, never has.

He walks along the shoreline, following his reflection as it ripples in restless but still calm water. The breeze bites at his forearms when he rolls his sleeves up and strokes the line of his neck when he plucks the first two buttons open.

It sucks to miss something as small as the look in someone's eyes. It sucks to miss crystalline, glowing irises when all he can see now is muddy waters and never-dying turmoil. He wishes George could understand that life is more beautiful when you stop pretending. That *he's* more beautiful when he lets light in.

Dream picks a rock up, feels it tense under the scrutiny of his gentle hands before he prepares to hurl it toward the silent lake and watch it bury itself once again. He's quickly learning that nothing ever goes his way.

"Having fun?" a stiff voice calls.

Dream whirls around, already knowing he'll find a blank face and heavy eyes and tense shoulders marching toward him. "Why are you here?"

"My mother sent me to check on you, obviously," he answers flatly, "We're still fiances. Now could you come back inside, I would really like to get this over with."

Dream swallows, turns around once more to hurl the rock toward the lake. "I'm not feeling well."

"Please, we both know that's a lie."

"It's not," Dream retorts, jaw clenched as his fingertips latch onto his collar.

George remains silent, coming to a stop a few feet behind Dream, avoiding the sticky shore. Dream keeps his eyes toward the silky stretch of water.

"Perhaps I was a bit harsh the other day," George says lowly, "I'm sorry. Now come on."

Dream's gaze falls to the uneven sand, the collection of pebbles embedded into it. "You weren't harsh, you were wrong."

"I find that hard to believe."

"You don't need to be fixed, George, that's not—believe me, I never thought that." He glances over his shoulder, pouring the truth of his words into his eyes as George stares back hard. "I didn't think you were a fraction of a human, I thought you were a fraction of *yourself*. You don't understand how—how much brighter you looked when even a *little* bit of that fell away." He tears his eyes away, lets them drop to the ground, "I guess I wasn't careful enough with my words. I meant—I meant you looked more alive. I'm sorry, I'm sorry that it came off wrong."

He sighs, collecting his thoughts as his eyes trace the soft shells of rocks. "It's just I—I remember when I felt that way. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe it's not the same. I know you hate to think that I can see right through your perfect little routine," he says with a small smile, "I don't know everything, but I know enough to know that you need a friend. I—I know we sort of got off on the wrong foot, but...it's okay to let people in, George. You are stuck with me, after all."

He looks up, keeping his face light and hopeful as George's remains blank.

"That night, you seemed like someone I would want to know," Dream admits. "Give me the chance."

George's eyes turn cautious, the corners of his lips turning down slightly. Dream waits, but George's silence drags on.

Finally, George exhales, glancing away. "We should go."

"What?"

"They're probably getting worried."

"George."

Without another word, he turns away, staring at his feet as they drag him over sharp blades of grass.

Dream is having a shitty week. Dream is having a *shitty* week.

For one, he's been friend-rejected by the elusive George and his classy fucking lips, because they really just refused to respond to Dream after he poured his heart out which is *really* fucking embarrassing. Then he was forced to waltz through several *wedding venues* with the boy while he tried to mask his humiliation. Of course, George merely remained blank and in his world, everything was fine and dandy and "*Oh, I love the space in this room,*" or, "*This altar is beautiful, don't you agree, Dream?*" Dream never exactly gave a shit what the fucking altar looked like but he just mumbled a simple, "*Yeah.*"

The day that followed, Dream was meant to attend another dance-practice-thing. He was particularly dreading that one, having to be close and faux-affectionate with George. He, however, pulled himself out of bed and forced himself to get ready for the awful misfortune that is his life. Only to find out when he got there that George did not bother to show up. He waited. But once twenty minutes passed and the ratty man—whose name is apparently Ricky—decided that George was not planning on attending (without explanation nor reason), he was forced to drag himself home once more and revel in his humiliation as well as mourn the loss of his dignity.

The rest of the week, Dream's parents towed him along to several *incredibly boring* business meetings. His ears ring with gross and unnecessarily complex words, while his tongue forever holds the aftertaste of tea which he is fairly certain is now stained into his mouth. On the plus side, he has successfully mastered the art of sleeping with his eyes open.

And now he's finally earned a day to himself. A day to lock himself into the confines of his room

where no one is allowed to bother him and where time is endless. He doesn't have to stuff his feet into shiny shoes or smother his skin in lavish suits. This is a miracle in itself, so he seizes the day and dresses to the nines in the only pair of sweatpants he owns and a loose-fitting t-shirt.

He waltzes down polished steps in wonderfully bare feet, headed for whatever he can find in their candy collection and a DVD of his favorite Disney movie from the grand study.

His first stop is in a smaller room, one with pure white cabinets and cupboards. The counters and shelves are lined with jars of sweets; chocolates and taffy, gummies and caramels. He grabs a small, crystalline bowl from a stack at the end of a counter and begins shoveling treats of his choice into it.

He's soon skipping down the hall once more, a bowl of mostly jelly beans tucked into his hand. He reaches a room that holds a large, mahogany desk in the center, placed before a throne and over a jade Persian rug. The desk is framed by bookcases, one of which holds DVDs and catches Dream's eye. It towers over him as his eyes scan the rows of plastic covers. He stands on his tippy-toes, plucking one from the shelf.

With his DVD in one hand and his assortment of candies in the other, he makes his way back toward the spiraling stairs. It's as soon as he's about to land on the first step that a knock sounds at the front door.

Dream glances at it, then peeks around the corners of the house in search of any employee scurrying over to answer it. When he finds no one, he decides to take matters into his own hands.

He shuffles over to the door, tucking his DVD under the arm that holds his bowl of candies. With his newly-freed hand, he tugs the door open.

It's not exactly what he expected to find, a lavender suit-clad George on his evening of freedom, looking properly startled and stunned to silence when he recognizes the face answering the door. Dream, who looks thoroughly underdressed compared to George and quite like a dork, blinks and raises a brow.

"What're you doing here?"

George blinks back. "I was sent to collect something for my father. Something of your father's."

Dream frowns slightly in confusion. "Oh, um. Yeah, come in." He steps aside as George steps forward, carefully into the house. "Do you know what it is?"

George drums his fingers against his leg. "No."

Dream places his items on a table beside the entrance, becoming increasingly aware of how silly he looks compared to George. "Okay, well, we could try the study. My parents aren't home right now, so."

George only nods, and so with murder on the brain, Dream begins leading him down the hall.

The silence is almost painful. Dream sort of wants to bash his own head into a wall.

"So," Dream attempts, voice strained, "Any idea at all what we're looking for?"

"I was told that it will be an envelope," George answers flatly.

Dream feels the tension seeping into his bloodstream. "Okay."

They reach the study that Dream stole his DVD from and Dream makes a beeline for the desk while George remains in the doorway. His eyes gloss over the contents of the surface of the desk, a few stacks of papers and clean books. When he finds no envelope, he pulls a small drawer open and begins flicking through the items it houses.

"Here," Dream announces, straightening as he presents a cream envelope that reads "*Monty*" in scrawly font. George's eyes blaze into his skin before he blinks the look away, taking a step forward into the room. He takes the envelope delicately, holding it between the tips of his fingers.

"Thank you," he says simply, his eyes cast downward. But he doesn't remove himself from the floor, run for the hills and escape the headache-inducing state of the room that cradles them.

Dream clears his throat, tapping his fingers against the desk. "Um, any reason you didn't come to the dance rehearsal the other day?" he inquires because George isn't leaving and he really has nothing else to say and he sort of wants George to feel guilty.

George sighs, his eyes leaving the envelope as he half-turns away. "To be honest," he murmurs, "I didn't want to go."

"So you just didn't?" Dream asks, his voice sharper than he meant it to be.

"So I didn't," George confirms simply.

"Why didn't you want to go?" Dream demands. "You have no trouble putting up a front when it's business, why didn't you just pretend like you always do?"

George frowns slightly. "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

George's eyes land on Dream once more, and Dream almost thinks they're earnest. "I'm sorry."

Dream shakes his head. "Whatever. You can go, now. You have your envelope."

George doesn't move, only breathes gentle and slow, his eyes setting fire to Dream's skin. Dream can't quite put a name to the look on his face.

After endless moments of stinging silence, Dream finds his lips asking, "Do you want to stay?"

George's eyes fall down to the envelope as his thumb drags over the corner of the fragile paper. He just barely nods, and it sends Dream's heart into sporadic beats.

He draws himself away from the desk, silently gliding past George and through the door. The boy follows as Dream retrieves his bowl and DVD, then follows as Dream ascends up the stairs. They wander down the hallway until Dream leads them into a room, his room.

He drops his bowl on the bedside table, eyes flicking to where George stands awkwardly beside the door.

"You can sit," Dream declares, motioning toward the opposite side of the bed as he removes the disk of *Alice in Wonderland* from its case. George's eyes trace the movements of his hands.

"What're you doing?" he asks, still not moving.

"I'm watching a movie," Dream mumbles, stumbling toward the DVD player.

"You want me to sit on your bed?"

Dream shrugs, "Or wherever, I don't care." He slips the disk through the crevice.

When Dream turns around once more and starts toward his bed, George still hasn't moved. He watches Dream with gentle eyes, his eyelashes a dark, bruising contrast compared to his milky skin.

"What is it?" Dream asks, landing atop the comforter and shuffling into place.

George remains silent and still for a moment before his lips begin to flutter. "I didn't mean to—to decline your offer. I hope you didn't take it personally, it wasn't my intent to upset you."

Dream frowns. "My offer?"

George shifts impatiently. "You know. The other day. I..."

Embarrassment rushes through Dream's veins as he remembers the moment. "Oh."

George says nothing more, doesn't provide answer to Dream's unspoken questions.

"You didn't mean to decline?" Dream prods, "Did you mean to accept?"

"Not exactly."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know."

Dream studies him for a moment, the secrets embedded in his skin he may never uncover. "Okay. So, was ignoring me the best option?" he asks carefully.

George swallows, scanning the edge of the bed. "It was the easiest option."

Dream's mind doesn't know how to unpack that one. "Just sit down and watch the movie," he says in defeat, his voice accompanied by a sigh. George doesn't, in fact, sit down and watch the movie.

George shakes his head. "I want to talk."

Dream's fingers rub circles into the center of his forehead. "It's hard to talk when you don't have the answer to anything."

George's eyes are now burning into Dream's, his sticky caramel irises open once more. Dream stills, his heart leaping.

"Thank you for being patient with me, Dream. And thank you for being honest."

"Honest?"

"You're the most real person I've met in a while," George confesses, "Out of all of the perfectly polite, well-rounded royals I'm surrounded with, somehow you're the one that fascinates me the most. And I loathe myself for it. So I pull away."

Dream loses words, simply blinks at the boy before him as he finally says something real, something honest.

"I don't want to let you in. I don't want you to know me," George continues steadily, "But I think at this point, it's out of my control. One way or another, whether I want it or not, I know you'll end up prying me open anyway. I would rather do it under my account."

Dream's mind spins, his eyes simply locked on the partly-cleared face of George and his ears devouring each sentence eagerly.

"I'll try my best," George says, voice lower, "I'll do my best, to be honest."

Dream's lips part to say *something* but his throat is empty. George's face is blank, forever blank, but his eyes are bright and that's enough for now.

"You're the definition of a royal pain in the ass," Dream says finally with a small smile, "Sit the fuck down now so we can watch the movie or I'll kick you out of my house."

George moves swiftly toward the bed, setting the envelope down on the dresser as he seats himself beside Dream, eyes smiling.

Chapter End Notes

I've always wanted to write a masquerade ball scene.

Thank you for reading AHHH I'm so excited to write with these new frenemies :))

Next chapter will hopefully be out sometime this week? But thank you for the support so far you guys are so kind <33

YOU'RE ALL LOVELY XO !!!

Together, We're an Oxymoron

Chapter Summary

We go places. Oh, the places we go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream sits a pretty wallflower as elegant decor is shoveled into the gaping mouth of his house. A soft breeze accompanies each piece of furniture, welcomed by the ajar set of doors, and each breeze brushes Dream's disapproving eyes as it flutters his hair.

There are quaint tables, boxes of bubble-wrapped dishes, carefully folded satin streamers, and what appears to be a champagne fountain (which Dream profusely ignores), all rushed in by eager feet and sturdy arms.

Dream stumbles back to his room, the promise of a long night cold on his fingertips.

It's wildly disorienting, seeing his house warped into a playhouse for the snobbish faces of unfamiliar people and their greasy fingers, but it's not the first time, he supposes.

Dream emerges in a fresh powder blue suit, his hair fallen into a loose display of blond strands rather than held tight and suffocating by gel. His parents are already perched beside the door, welcoming guests as the house slowly fills and the once clean room turns spoiled. Perfumed skin, cocktail dresses, and classy suits blend into a wicked blur of giddy faces. It's all too intimate for Dream's taste, the air quickly losing its youth as it grows sticky.

He falls into place beside his parents, sort-of-smiling at each elite face and extending a hand for their own to grasp. Each holds the eyes of a vulture and the grin of a doll. Dream is more than happy when he's swept away by the arrival of his fiancé.

George smiles his plastic smile, shakes hands with both of Dream's parents. He follows his own parents, his father decked in a slick raven suit and his mother in a violet dress, a black feather boa wrapped around her shoulders. In stark contrast, George's suit is pure white, a heather dress shirt tucked underneath. Dream hardly notices his attire, though, his gaze caught on George's soft, vibrant eyes. When they land on Dream, his expression turns slightly hesitant, still cautious.

They don't shake hands, in fact, George sidles up beside Dream without so much as a word. And almost without thinking, Dream snakes an arm around his waist.

"Why don't you two go ahead," Dream's mother inputs instantly, "We'll finish greeting the guests without you, Dream."

It wasn't exactly Dream's intent, but it seemed to work wonderfully in his favor. So he nods, attempting to mask a devilish smile with sincerity, and begins dragging George through the heart of the house.

He heads for the emptiest corner, in passing stealing two glasses from a silver tray held atop the palm of a quiet man. He offers one to George, who simply shakes his head, which receives an eye-roll from Dream.

"Take it, you stubborn fuck."

George glares in warning at his foul language. "I don't want it."

"Why not?"

"I've *told* you—"

"That is a bullshit excuse if I've ever heard one," Dream declares, the hint of a smile on his lips, "Everyone likes alcohol. *Especially* someone who spends all day surrounded by middle-aged assholes with thick wallets."

George sends him a look as they push through another sea of bodies. "Dream, in case you didn't notice, we happen to be in a room full of *said people*. So if you mind watching your words."

They finally reach an empty spot in the overflowing house, a shadowy patch beside a tall window that invites drunk moonlight in. Dream places his spare glass on a stray table.

"Tell the truth, George," he prods, taking a sip from his own glass.

"What makes you think I'm not?" George challenges.

One corner of Dream's lips raises slightly, his free hand lifting from his side. His fingertips settle below George's chin, tilting his face upward. The other side of his lips follows suit at the irritated look on George's face. "I've been told I'm good at reading people," he answers, ticking his head to the side.

George's small hand reaches up, tugging Dream's away firmly. "You're pushing it."

Dream grins. "You said you'd be honest."

"Strange thing to be honest about," George answers, "Why do you want to know so bad?"

"We're starting small. See, we've already made progress, because you just admitted that there's a real answer you're not telling me."

George pauses, retracing his steps as he glares at Dream, who only smiles wider.

"It's an easy one, George," Dream comforts.

George exhales, glancing toward the decorated bodies before them. "I like to be in control," he starts slowly, "I am to maintain a good image, after all. It's easier to slip up when you're under the influence."

"Not if it's only a little bit," Dream challenges.

"I'd rather not take any risks," George answers simply.

Dream shrugs, taking another sip as he watches George's gentle eyes where they watch the busy room. His gaze is quiet, brushing against silver-smothered collarbones and cuff-choked wrists.

"Sometimes I forget," George says, voice gorgeous satin, "That we're to be married. In part, because I've gotten so used to despising you."

Dream huffs a small laugh before his features fall solemn. "I forget, too." George says nothing more, so Dream takes the opportunity to soothe a question that's been stuck in the forefront of his mind. "You—you hated me, right? But you said...you said that you were fascinated by me. How does that work?"

"One can be both," George answers smoothly, "Hateful and fascinating."

"I don't see how."

George exhales, eyes flitting to the mural painted on the ceiling. "Don't you find me the same way?"

Dream's heart suddenly leaps, his eyes scowling. "What do you mean?"

"You're not subtle. I often found you watching me."

Dream says nothing, simply stares at the smooth and calm features of George, how he keeps them this perfect and collected so easily.

"I didn't like you for the same reasons I found you intriguing. The way you spoke your mind, how you hardly cared what people saw you for, especially in this industry where the spotlight is always on you. It frustrated me. It was reckless, put risk in a world I had stepped so carefully through as to not make a mistake."

George's eyes sink to the swirling crowds once more. "The thing is, I had never seen anything like it before. Anyone I had worked with previously was a perfectionist in every aspect, as we're taught to be. So naturally, when I met you it was quite a shock. To be honest," George sighs, his voice falling lower, "I found myself wishing I could be the same way."

Dream's veins swell with a mix of pride and wonder, his heart soaring.

"You're reckless, maybe, or you're free. And it was a difficult grief to deal with so far into life, finally realizing I wasn't entirely free. So you could say I lived vicariously through you, but that feels a bit sad. I'd say I was fascinated with a life so different, yet similar, to my own. Fascinated with a person willing to live despite a world desperately begging them not to."

Dream feels weightless, but heavy all the same.

"You'd say I'm free?" he wonders, "Despite—despite all this?"

"Freedom is granted by no one but yourself," George answers simply.

Dream's head spins.

"Why are we in the corner?" George asks suddenly, brows lowering over amber irises and dark lashes. "Isn't the point of a party to socialize?"

"I don't like people," Dream answers unsteadily, still dizzy.

"Doesn't matter, it's your party and these are your guests."

"Technically, it's my parents' party," Dream counters.

"What would you normally do?" George inquires eagerly, eyes set in childlike wonder, still never meeting Dream's, "If I wasn't here to keep you company?"

Dream smiles slightly at that but doesn't point it out. "Drink from afar," he hums.

"Sounds lonely."

"What's more lonely is pretending I enjoy these peoples' company when I would much rather be anywhere else," Dream explains. George frowns softly, a puppy frown.

"It's weird seeing it like this," he murmurs.

"What?"

"From the sidelines. They all look so...fake."

Dream falls silent, swallowing his unease. Shadows set on his skin as he eyes the room of marionettes, their strings clutched by the wicked fingers of greed. His home has been turned into a dollhouse.

Dream remembers when he met George, when he encountered his void eyes and empty smile for the first time. The way his skin crawled, the way something like ice seeped into his bloodstream.

It almost hurts when George's eyes turn to him, dipped in demand. Like they're begging for honesty. But they're also horrified.

"That's how I look," he asks, but it's not a question, it's stated flatly and it's begging, "That's how I look to you."

Dream pours apology into his eyes, simply searching George's for a moment.

"Isn't it, Dream?"

"No," Dream tries weakly. George scoffs at his fragile attempt, his gaze tracing the crowd again, this time in panic. "George," Dream asks lowly, his hand falling gently over George's shoulder blade, "It's alright, okay? Calm down."

"It's not."

"You're not—you're not *them*."

"Of course I am," George breathes, the words ornamented in sapphire flames.

"George, come on."

"Just—be *quiet*, for a moment," George begs, adding a small, "Please."

Dream falls silent once more, tearing his hand away. He watches George carefully while George watches the room. His eyes are widened, soaked in something Dream can't quite place. It's dark and it's somber and it's sticky. His gaze darts from faraway face to faraway face, dancing on the edge of fear. But it's not fear. Each time he finishes surveying a guest his fingers twitch, threatening to close in on themselves. Dream's heart stutters.

It was a difficult grief to deal with...

Finally realizing I wasn't entirely free.

Dream reaches out, sliding their hands' side by side, palms bruised with the brush of the other's. He entwines their fingers loosely, because they've done this a thousand times over and because he can get away with it but mostly because he doesn't want George to feel alone.

George says nothing, only continues to trace grieving eyes over captive bodies. After a long, still moment, George's lips breathe again.

"Can we..."

Dream waits for more but receives nothing. "What is it?"

George's hand clutches tighter around Dream's, and it's so quiet and so subtle that Dream almost misses it. His mind runs rampant, making him dizzy.

"I don't want to be here," George mumbles, ebony lashes fluttering against gold.

Without a second thought, Dream begins tugging George away from the silent corner, leaving two half-full glasses side by side on the stray table. He steps carefully through porcelain bodies, eyes set in determination. When he reaches the end of the main room, he rounds the corner into a long, empty hallway.

It's one parallel to the one he and George stumbled through when they first met, and it's a mirror image too. The high ceiling holds pastel brushstrokes, the doors hold golden detailing, and the marble floors click against their soles. Powder blue wallpaper provides cushion to the shadowy tunnel while the many doors provide hope.

They stand before an everlasting pathway, the promise of solitude on their fingertips.

Dream begins peeling his suit jacket off, turning to gauge George's expression. It's blank, and the boy simply blinks at the hallway. But it's somehow still elegant, Dream doesn't know how he does it. Smooth milky skin and an acute jaw, clever lips and eyes full of wonder.

"Well, come on, then," Dream hums as he starts down the hall, jacket clutched by his side.

"Where are we going?" George asks, still stuck to the entrance.

"Nowhere," Dream calls back. He soon hears footsteps retracing his.

"Slow down," George grumbles, drawing a memory deep from Dream's conscience. He comes to a stop, smiling as he takes a step back and a small body collides with his. He hears a muffled noise of surprise, followed by the sound of George stumbling backward. Dream grins wider, spinning around.

"Really?" George complains, smoothing his hands over his suit.

"Keep—"

"Yeah, yeah, *keep up*. You're just *so* hilarious," delight tugs at Dream's lips as George glares up at him, "Sorry I don't have *giraffe legs*."

"I think the problem is *your* tiny legs," Dream retorts.

George's eyes narrow. "I'm average height."

"Of course you are, darling," Dream coos, stealing George's hand and dashing down the hallway with it in tow.

"Dream—"

"Keep up!"

Frame-trapped artworks pass by in a blur, the polished, starlit floor marked by the click of flying footsteps. With each step, the ribbon of already traveled road grows, left behind in a flurry. Their ivory skin is bruised by the rush of wind their momentum molds, soothing aching wounds. They come to a stop where the hallway ends, greeted by a new one that extends in both directions.

"Right or left?" Dream asks, releasing George's hand. George takes a step forward to inspect either direction, but Dream quickly clasps a hand over his eyes. "You can't look, just pick."

"Why not?" George complains, reaching up to tug at Dream's hand unsuccessfully.

"That's the game," Dream explains, "You have to take the risk." He can practically feel the glare on the palm of his hand.

"Seriously?"

"Just *pick*, you—"

"Fine, left," George declares. Dream's hand falls away from his face as he starts down the left side of the hallway.

The right wall is lined with arched, crystal windows, metallic light spilling onto the floor. The left wall holds more doors and paintings still, a few pots of scarlet roses arranged along the edge of the floor. George's eyes admire each one, brushing along smooth petals as they curl into each other. Dream stops before a crystal door, grabbing George's wrist and pulling the fragile boy under the night sky.

They're met with two sets of stairs and a meadow of grass, the blades kissed by dewdrops. The scene is set in hues of sapphire and indigo, all deep shadows and smiling glitter. The moon looks down on them giddily, leaping high in the sky. At the edge of the field, a small wall made to keep them at bay sits.

Dream leaves his jacket over the railing of the balcony, starting down the steps. George follows wordlessly.

They pass over green side by side, their figures swallowed whole by the overwhelming meadow. Their shadows lay behind them, tragic in the perfect painting of the night. The cold bites at their face and turns their cheeks pink, but never dulls the shine of their eyes.

They finally reach the wall, and Dream places his palms atop the smooth stone and pulls himself up. He swings one leg over, the other one mirroring as he glances down at George.

He looks youthful, skin doused in starlight and his eyes catching the rest. They're wide and bright, springs of liquid gold, and canopied by dark lashes. His lips sit lush in a flat line, the dark hair dusting his forehead and the tips of his ears slightly mussed from minutes of running.

"What are you doing?" George inquires carefully. His eyes follow Dream's hand as it pats the spot next to him, then find their way back to his face. "I can't," he answers.

"Why not?"

George eyes the wall once more. "I don't want to ruin my suit."

Dream huffs a laugh. "Buy another one, Princess. Come on."

"How am I meant to get up there?" George grumbles, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You're an idiot."

"I'm too small."

Dream grins as he swings one leg back over, leaning down to extend his hand toward George. "You could've just asked," he hums.

George's eyes narrow. "What do you mean?"

"Oh my *god*, just get the fuck up here, you're missing the view."

George sighs, unfolding his arms to pull his jacket off. He lays it carefully over the wall and places his palm beside it, his other hand wrapping around Dream's forearm. Dream hauls him upward until he's sitting stable, his short legs dangling off the edge. Dream throws his leg back over, hands clutched around the edge of the wall.

"Bad day to pick a full white suit," Dream teases.

"I did not anticipate my evening including climbing walls," George mumbles, inspecting his pants and dusting off anything he deems unacceptable.

Dream leans into his side, nose just brushing the hinge of his jaw. The boy's eyes flick over to him before they fall again, jaw clenched tight.

"Look up, idiot," Dream instructs, a small smile playing on his lips.

Slowly, George's gaze lifts, stumbling upon evergreen hills and juniper treetops. They're painted in darkness, the pearlescent acrylic of the stars and the violet watercolor of the sky. They extend far, and somewhere in the distance, they give way to the barest hint of city lights.

George's eyes light with a smile that doesn't quite reach past the whites of his eyes, but the hint of one spills onto his silver skin, dusting it in something shimmery. It leaves Dream's heart warm.

When Dream pulls away George turns to him, face simple but still glowing.

"It's pretty," he says gently.

Dream tugs a smile inward, "Worth ruining your suit?"

George rolls his eyes, facing the scene once again. The slope of his nose shelves milky moonlight, some caught in the tips of his lashes and the cushion of his lips. "Maybe."

"Do you see the lights," Dream asks, lifting a finger to poke the horizon, "Way back there?"

"I do."

"You ever been to the city, George? When you're not decked in fancy suits," Dream teases.

George eyes him. "I have."

Dream nods, tracing the glow of city lights with his eyes, "I like the city. It feels human."

There's a pause. "Hm."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"No, what?"

"I didn't say anything."

Dream stares at him, George's eyes stuck on the sky. Dream marvels at the incline of his jaw, the amber glow of his eyes. Words slip from his lips before he can think them over, formed by his unruly tongue.

"You're prettier."

His face instantly heats, the bitter air doing little to soothe it. His stomach flips.

George's gaze burns his skin further, the emotion in his eyes unreadable. His eyebrows are lowered ever so slightly, lips pressed into a tight line.

It's something swirling, but calmer than a storm, in his irises. It's darker but not dimmer, and it's syrupy. Dream can't look away.

"Prettier?" he asks.

Dream, effortlessly bold and blazing Dream, finds words difficult now. His stomach knots, heart stammering. His voice comes off unsteady.

"Prettier than the view."

George's lashes flutter and Dream loses his eyes for a moment, George casting them downward. They're thinking, holding Dream's words beside wonder. When they lift once more they're earnest.

"I don't know what to say," he says sadly, desperately, "I'm sorry."

Dream shakes his head, turning away as he tries to find air again. "Don't say anything."

George obeys for a moment, allowing a silent pause until he stains Dream's ears again.

"Thank you."

Dream keeps his eyes forward.

George's thumb passes over smooth, crimson fabric before he drops it back into place. "Don't you have a Tiffany blue tie?"

"Who the fuck am I, the Candyman?"

George rolls his eyes. "You could've just said no."

"Why do I need a tie, anyway? Don't you think that's a bit overkill?" Dream slumps down onto the ottoman, watching as George meanders past rows of happy fabric.

George shrugs. "Just think it would be nice."

"If I don't have to, I'm not gonna."

George sighs, eyes passing over an array of satin shoulders. "Just pick something. We're going to be late."

"You know Ricky's always late, anyway."

"That doesn't mean we should be."

Dream drums his fingers against the velvet fabric below him, "I still don't understand the point of these lessons."

"It's not meant to be lessons," George mutters, "It's choreography."

"Whatever, it's still boring. We should just stay in."

George shakes his head. "We've already missed one. My parents would be angry."

"That was your fault."

"I know."

Dream pauses, studying George's careful expression. "We could watch Cinderella. I know you're enthralled by charming princes."

George's eyes flick over to him, demanding but smiling slightly still. "Get dressed."

Dream suppresses a grin that still manages to slip through, standing and starting toward a row of turtlenecks. "Fine, get out."

So George does, exits smoothly and leaves Dream to twirl his fingers in soft fabric and roam through a full closet. Moments later he finds himself wrapped in gentle cotton that snakes up his neck and down his arms, and a pair of corduroys.

When he reenters his bedroom, George is stood in front of a cherry wood dresser, hands clasped behind his back. His eyes are set on something, and as Dream draws nearer he finds an old picture frame he had left there to bathe in sunlight, hopefully wear away.

It's a broken family portrait, his parents occupying each corner looking the same as they do now. The only hint of change in them is the lack of wrinkles, only a few carved into their face. Dream stands in the center between the both of them. His face carries the soft roundness of baby cheeks and his hair is a shade blonder. His eyes aren't as heavy as they are now, but the smile painted on his face bares enough of a glimpse into the weight on his shoulders.

Dream comes up beside George, resisting the urge to reach over and knock the picture flat on its face. George studies it with critical eyes, a violence that somehow remains gentle.

"Thank god for glow-ups, right?" Dream tries, a remark that doesn't quite land amongst the tension George has built in the room.

"When was this?" George asks smoothly.

"A few years ago, I think I was probably fifteen," Dream says, watching George's features.

George glances up at him, eyes slightly muddled with something like confusion. His gaze traces over the strokes of Dream's face. "You've changed a lot," he comments.

Dream attempts a small smile, fingers drumming against the dresser, "Yeah, well. It was a long time ago."

George's scrutiny is stolen by the portrait once more. Something blue settles on the dips of his face. "Your smile."

Dream swallows. "My smile?"

"Your eyes, too."

Dream doesn't tear his gaze from where George's eyes are begging the boy in the picture. "I...I guess I look pretty different."

George shakes his head. "Your face is the same."

Dream grits his teeth.

"Somehow I can't believe it's you," George murmurs.

Before he can think, Dream's shaky hand is cracking down on the picture, sending it into the surface of the dresser and out of view. He turns away unsteadily, his stomach churning as he takes a step forward. The sharp hand runs through his hair, pale fingers trembling. The feeling of George's delicate eyes on him has no mercy on his writhing veins.

"Are you alright?" George asks tentatively, his frightened state creeping into his voice, "I'm—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you."

"You're fine," Dream mumbles, eyes catching on anything and everything in the room in an attempt to find a distraction. He draws himself further away from the dresser, George, and the picture.

"I'm sorry," George repeats desperately, "Dream, are you okay?"

Dream's breath is shuddering as he gasps for composure. He shoves his hands into his pocket, face hard, "I'm fine," he answers flatly.

"I don't—I don't know what I—"

Dream's head begins to throb and he blinks at the floor, hoping his wild mind will cease its pounding at his skull.

"Dream, I'm sorry—"

"I said it's *fine*," Dream snaps, pressing his fists to his eyes. His hands drag up to tug through his hair, squeezing at his overflowing mind.

George falls silent and Dream grasps onto the sound of his deep breaths, attempts to match his own

with their pace. He crushes his eyes shut and focuses solely on that, listening to inhale and exhale, finding escape in the quiet.

"You're scaring me," George breathes.

Dream feels something tear through him, send a cold ripple through his body, and he can't help but glance over his shoulder. George's eyes are widened, rich with the terror of a nightmare. The boy wrings his hands, lips cracked.

Dream feels his chest swell, the sensation soon rushing to his eyes. They wilt closed as he turns back around. George only wilts closer, drawn in.

The first reach is a hand on his bicep, sad and careful porcelain. He guides Dream slowly, asking him to face George again. Dream's body obeys despite his racing mind. George peers at him cautiously, his movements languid as to not make a wrong move. His eyes are full of the comfort of a purple sky, glittering stars, and fair moonlight. It sends a dose of an antidote through Dream's veins, soothes his writhing skin vaguely.

Dream stares back at him with weary eyes, attempting to form the apology in jade irises that his tongue can't.

There's a moment where George hesitates. It sort of speaks volumes in complete silence, the way George's gaze flows from his hand on Dream's arm to his wounded face with calculation. And when he swallows thickly, and when he exhales uncertainty. Like he's never done this before. Like he's not sure how to comfort, but he wants to for Dream, for some odd reason.

George wraps his arms around Dream's waist and tucks his face into his chest, the gesture enough to steal Dream's heartbeat.

Tentatively, Dream winds his own arms around George's shoulders, holding him tight.

It's strange. It's strange because George is a distant person. Always too far, never daring to live any other way. Here, in Dream's arms, he feels real. He lets the gap between them close and he lets Dream cling to him. He lets vulnerability seep through the cracks of his porcelain exterior. Dream buries himself deep in the feeling, pulls George closer and hides his face in his shoulder. His ears fall victim to the hypnotic rhythm of George's breath, his lungs subconsciously falling in sync.

It's a knock that disrupts the warmth. Devastation rushes through Dream's veins, but nevertheless, he pulls away. His eyes skitter to the door and he swallows the knot in his throat. It almost startles him to hear his own voice, after so long of silence.

"Come in," he invites, some annoyance slipping into his voice.

The door swings open, a wary Cecille stood in the doorway. She regards George with a hint of surprise before her eyes return to Dream. "The carriage is waiting," she announces.

Dream nods, lips pressed into a tight line. "We'll be just a moment."

With a nod in return, she slips away, leaving Dream and George to the steady pulse of silence. Dream sighs, stuffing his hands into his pocket as he simply stares at the door.

"Deem my outfit good enough?" he mumbles, attempting to relieve the aching tension between them.

George pauses before his throat springs to life, words light, "Yes, you did a good job."

Dream attempts a smile, taking a step toward the door. "We're going to be late."

They walk through the house in silence, spend the carriage ride in silence, and for the most part, dance in silence.

When they arrive at the over-the-top excuse of a dance studio five minutes late, the room is empty. They stand in the center of a vast floor, the air completely still, and simply wait for what feels like an endless few minutes. Dream finally releases the breath he didn't realize he'd been holding when the back door bursts open, announcing a noisy guest who'll surely fill the blank silence.

"Alright!" Ricky booms, arms spread as he begins the journey toward the center of the floor, "I don't have much time today, you see, I have an appointment soon. So let's get straight to it, yeah?"

Dream's fingers itch at the thought of having to hold George again, be close and look the boy in the face after their untouched moment.

He comes to a stop in front of them, dropping his messenger bag in a pile on the floor. When his eyes finally settle on the pair, his eyebrows instantly dip low over grey irises.

"What's happened?" he demands.

Dream blinks, glancing at George before retraining his gaze on the man.

"Sorry?" George asks.

Ricky sighs, rubbing his palms into his eyes, "You know what, I don't even think I want to know. I don't have time for this," he grumbles. "Positions, please, what we created last time."

Dream clears his throat as he turns to face George, the boy already regarding him with cautious eyes. Dream ignores it, instead watches his hands as they fall to the small of George's back. George lays his own hands over the curve of Dream's neck, and a strict, "Ahem," from Ricky has them shuffling closer.

They spring into action as Ricky begins roaring directions, melding a choreography. George's eyes always seem to be burning into Dream's as Dream firmly avoids them. They radiate wonder and demand, perhaps still on edge from Dream's small outburst. Searching for answer in Dream's face, begging to be seen or to meet reassurance.

Dream doesn't realize how deep he's fallen into his own mind and swirling thoughts until he misses an instruction, and a polished shoe comes crashing down onto his toes. He blinks to life, met with an earful of complaints from Ricky.

"Dream, Dream, buddy, focus! Where is your mind at, pal, we gotta..."

Dream's gaze tears away from him as his reprimands become fuzzy background noise, finally meeting the worry-sickened eyes of a blank face. Dream swallows thickly, his own eyes wide and sticky, soaked in something blue. His hands fall away and he takes a quiet step back.

"You know what, how about we cut this session short, yeah?" Ricky declares, glancing at his empty wrist for time, "I don't think we'll get anything done this way."

Dream's eyes have already scattered to the floor and he nods slightly. Ricky begins collecting his things from the floor, rambling about something that only sounds blurry to Dream. The next time he looks up Ricky is heading for the door, disappearing only seconds later.

"What happened?" George asks from somewhere distant.

Dream stares at the exit for a moment longer before he turns slowly around, away from George.

"What do you mean?"

"You were...completely zoned out."

Dream takes one step forward, his second stopped by a hand catching his wrist.

"Dream, what's wrong?" he pleads, "I—I can't figure it out. What I did, exactly."

"It's not about you," Dream retorts.

"You're angry with me," George counters, "Aren't you?"

Dream frowns to himself. "Why would I be angry with you?"

George pauses, his voice steadier when he speaks again, "You won't look at me."

Dream bites down on his lip, exhaling as he turns carefully around again. George's eyes are soft, murky puddles of rain. "I'm not angry with you," Dream says, his own eyes locked with the boy's, "It's not your fault."

"Should I not have hugged you?" George asks, voice small, "I don't really..."

Dream's brows knit together, "What?"

George fidgets with his fingers, staring at them. "I've never really had a friend before, I...I'm sorry if I get it wrong."

Dream's face instantly falls, his insides wilting. His throat grows sticky as he searches for words to say, none of them enough.

"No, George," he breathes, reaching a hand out but unsure where to put it, "Of course it was okay, don't—don't apologize," he steps closer, his hand molding around George's jaw. He tilts his face up, forces him to meet Dream's eyes, "I promise you, you haven't done anything wrong."

George stares back for a moment, his irises glowing honey. Then he looks down, pressing his forehead to Dream's chest and exhaling.

"I'm just afraid," he murmurs.

"Afraid of what?" is Dream's instant response. He wraps his arms around George's narrow shoulders.

George never answers, leaving the words a permanent question in Dream's mind that he never dares to ask.

Chapter End Notes

Damn, chapter 5, that's crazy.

Thank you guys for 1k hits??? That's so cool. I always love reading your comments so leave one if you want to, drop opinions and thoughts or drop a kudos maybe if you

want ;)

You're lovely xoxoxo

But We Fit

Chapter Summary

Error 404

Chapter Notes

(Hey guys follow my twitter @yungluvXD for updates and also I'm funny)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's become a bit of a habit of theirs, sneaking away during wickedly polite events.

Most of the time, it's Dream complaining on and on until George agrees to run away with him, away from suffocating walls. Dream always gets his way, even if it takes time. And they'll find someplace with solitude, go anywhere as long as it's theirs. Flying across hallways, combing through open fields, chasing the moon, storming through ornate gardens, they've done it all.

When George asks, it's not in the form of words. It's when he falls silent during conversation, or when his eyes turn panicked and fragile, or when he seems to shrink in his seat, or when he fidgets with his hands in his lap. Dream notices, he always does, and though George is always reluctant at first, he'll let Dream pull him away. George calls it a foul habit and claims that each time will be their last, but Dream knows he secretly enjoys it.

Hanging around Dream's house has become another habit of theirs, or rather, of George's. Dream always lets him, mostly because he can see the appeal after visiting the haunted mansion that is George's home, but also because he's found himself enjoying George's company. Even if they hardly speak at all, barely acknowledge each other's presence, Dream is happy to know he's there. Usually, those are the days where George seems to be off.

It's like there's something weighing in the back of his mind, and it'll show in the way his eyes turn slightly greyer, dulled. Dream has tried to ask before, but he's come to realize those are the days where George needs space. He'll ache quietly and Dream will ache along with him, can't help but feel guilty, but George never gives him an answer.

Today's a good day, however. Dream ranks it as a yellow.

Dream leans against his headboard, fingertips flicking through a catalog his mother asked him to look through. George sits at the other end of his bed, staring aimlessly at the window with light eyes. Occasionally he'll glance over to Dream, or tug a hand through his hair, or wander around the room with his eyes for a moment. The room holds a steady bliss. That is, until George speaks.

"Will you tell me," he asks carefully, "What it was about the picture?"

Dream licks his fingertip to peel another page away, meeting George's gaze with wary eyes. "What do you mean?" He knows perfectly well what George means.

George studies him for a moment, his guarded expression, before he continues. "Why did it make you so upset," he asks.

Dream's eyes fall to the paper once more. "Just, memories," he murmurs.

"Of what?" George prods, scanning him delicately.

Dream attempts to keep his voice flat, but it comes off sharp. "You know what."

George's gaze stutters. "I don't," he answers jaggedly.

"You recognized it," Dream says, voice lower, "I know you did."

George says nothing and so Dream meets his eyes again, finding them gentle and frowning. George bites his lip, glancing away.

"I remember..." his eyelashes flutter dizzily, "I remember what you said. When we were visiting wedding venues, and you had stormed off."

Dream's stomach whirls messily. He dumps the catalog in his lap and looks to the window instead, cold glass against pale sky. "I don't want to talk about this."

"It was the first time we'd spoken since you called me real. And since I snapped at you. I was still angry."

They've never done this before, retraced the steps that led them to friends. Dream doesn't think he wants to. He doesn't like revisiting bad memories.

"Until," George breathes, "You said that you *remembered*—"

"What're you doing?" Dream snaps, eyes serrated and now digging into George's skin.

"I want to know," George answers, voice steady and his own eyes unyielding, "I want you to be honest."

Dream scoffs, "I think I've been perfectly clear," he bites, "I don't want to talk about it."

George's face is set in determination, eyes softly blazing, "You can trust me."

"Doesn't matter."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I'm not revisiting it."

George pauses, watching him for a moment. Shadow-bruised ivory skin and artfully disheveled blond hair, but the real gem lies below deep-set brows. Dull gold in the eyes of George.

"How can you ask me to be honest with you," George asks, "And not do the same in return?"

Dream clenches his jaw, "It's not the same."

"How so?" George demands.

"I'm honest enough as it is," Dream declares, voice sour, "I don't spend every minute of my life hiding behind some fake persona."

George's wild, fixed eyes fall back, giving way to something quieter. Ashes where fire once was, the echo of tragedy, hurt. He watches as Dream hears his own words, catching his tongue too late.

"Wait, George—"

"That's fine," George answers dully, "Suppose I deserved it."

"*No*, no, George—"

His voice remains monotone, face matching, "I shouldn't have pushed you. I'm sorry."

Dream's eyes turn earnest, the subject of their plead soon falling away as George rips himself from the mattress. Dream instantly springs up off of his side of the bed, catching George by his shoulders when he's halfway to the door.

George's face instantly twists away, gaze discarded over his shoulder, although he remains still. His voice is smooth enough, though it always is.

"I'm not angry. I just want to go."

"*George.*"

"Just let me go."

Dream's grasp on him tightens, desperate. "Look at me," he begs. George says nothing, does nothing, and so Dream's hand settles against his neck as his thumb reaches up to turn George's chin forward. George's gaze remains cast downward, walking along Dream's collarbone, until finally, it shifts upward, clicking into place with Dream's.

It hits Dream in a wave of guilt and sorrow where he expected relief.

It's the second time he's seen George cry, this time infinitely worse because it was *him*. He hurt George.

There's a thick wall of tears before dark molasses, and it's dizzying. The weight of Dream's words all held in the irises of the boy before him. One tear slips from George's grasp but he's quick to wipe it away, the only evidence of its escape being the shiny trail spoiling the canvas of George's cheek. Dream wishes he could push every fragmented piece of George back into place, even if the sharp edges of porcelain leave scars on his fingertips, just so George would never cry again.

Dream can't help it when his hand slips upward, wraps with care around George's face and fragile skin, when his thumb dances along George's cheekbone.

"I'm sorry," he breathes, throat dry, "I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking, I wasn't—I'm sorry, George."

George lays his fingers over Dream's wrist and Dream half expects him to pull the hand away from his face. But he doesn't, simply leaves his fingertips brushing against bone.

"If that's what you think then why are you friends with me," he mumbles.

"I don't think that," Dream affirms, breathless.

"Drunken words are sober thoughts," George states flatly as another tear falls. This one George doesn't wipe away. Dream's eyes follow it as it cuts through smooth plane of skin. "Drunk on anger, all the same."

Dream shakes his head. "No, I—"

"You've proven that time and time again," George says slowly, eyes dropping to the base of Dream's neck.

"I didn't *mean it*, George."

They flick upward once more, painted with distrust and disappointment. "I believed it when you said it," George says brazenly, "The first time. And the second time. And the third time. I believe you."

Desperation drags through Dream's insides like mud, plaguing his eyes with fragility. "Don't," he pleads, "Don't believe me."

"*You* believe you."

"*No*—"

George's hand slips upward, fingertips locking over Dream's knuckles as he tugs the hand down, letting it fall by Dream's side.

"It's okay," the softened tune of his voice makes Dream dizzy, "I'm not angry, Dream. It's the truth. I just have to deal with it."

"George."

He takes a step back, giving Dream a last once-over before his eyes find the door beyond Dream's shoulder.

"I'm sure you did, too."

It's a terrible inconvenience, Dream thinks, that he's grown so fond of George's company. Because when the boy goes missing it's like he's taken a part of Dream with him.

Dream had spent the rest of the night replaying words in his head, like a broken record. It was maddening, yes, but he had long ago realized that the whims of his thoughts were out of his control. And so he's ready to sink into his bed and let them eat away at him, wait for sleep to save him. He longs for closed curtains, to hide his eyes and drift away. He never gets the chance, however.

It's a great misfortune that he has a door and that his mother has knuckles.

"Come in," he grumbles, a hand kneading into his weary eyes.

As soon as his mother enters he knows something is wrong. Her eyes scan the room as her fingers fiddle with each other. Her face is tighter than usual, eyes strained.

"Were you just about to sleep?" she asks, meeting his careful gaze. He frowns.

"Everything alright?"

"I don't want to worry you, don't want to keep you up."

He shakes his head, "Tell me, please. Is it Dad? Is he alright?"

She exhales, delicate hands falling to her sides. "No, it's...it's not him. He's alright."

"Then what?" Dream pleads, nerves beginning to prick at his fingertips. She pauses, studying him.

"When was the last time you spoke to George?" she says gently.

"George?" Dream echoes, heart sinking, "I...this afternoon, he was...he was over. He left hours ago. Why?"

Words haunt him. They only grow louder when his mother speaks again.

"George hasn't been home since," she says slowly, voice creeping.

"What?" Dream asks, the word ripping from his chest without his control, "What do you mean, where is he?"

She regards him with soft eyes which only serves to twist the knot in his chest further. "We don't know. They called hoping he would be here."

Unease rushes to Dream's stomach and he has to turn away, lips parted in hopes of grasping onto air. He begins to tug through his hair, mind chanting. "Have they looked—have they *tried*?"

A hand comes to rest on his shoulder but it does little to slow his thoughts, "Yes, of course."

"Well clearly not enough," Dream bites.

"They've decided to wait until morning for now," she says carefully.

"*Wait?*"

"There's not much we can do now, Dream. They hope he'll turn up by then."

"And if he doesn't?" Dream demands, twisting to glare over his shoulder.

She swallows, eyes wide and syrupy, "Don't think about that until it comes to it."

His chest swells, throat burning with rapid flames that lick up into his skull. His eyes find the door, the faint glow of honey light at the end of the hallway. "We have to help, right? We have to go look. We have to—to find him."

"Dream, we have no idea where he could be—"

"Well we have to *try*," Dream snaps, eyes violent and shooting toward his mother once more.

"I think you should get some rest, darling," she argues gently.

Dream scoffs, glancing at the light beyond the door. "I won't, even if I tried."

"There's nothing you can do right now, Dream."

Dream squeezes his eyes shut, feels the pull of exhaustion in the process, before his now glossed-over eyes find his mother. "I can't sleep," he murmurs, voice strangled.

She frowns softly, lifting a hand to caress Dream's scalp. "He may be here by the time you wake up," she whispers.

He leans into the touch, fighting away tears. "You'll tell me," he asks, "As soon as he's come back?"

"You'll be the first to know," she answers without hesitation.

Dream sighs and tucks his bottom lip between his teeth, "I'll try."

She nods, giving him a small, blue smile. "I know you care for him, dear. He'll be just fine, I promise you."

Dream glances away toward the floor, a shallow, "Yeah," leaving his lips. Because it's not her promise to make, and because she's already broken it.

And so Dream doesn't sleep that night. He spends it with his eyes stuck to the ceiling, tracing patterns of moonlight, walking along the edge of a dream state. Sometimes he'll rip himself from the covers. He'll stand before the long windows and watch the night, wonder where George lays tucked within it. He'll step out into the hallway and simply gaze down each end, both swallowed by dark, wonder if he had chosen his words carefully that evening would he know that George is safe now.

It's a night eaten by fear, guilt, and worry. Under smothering sheets and washed in pale light he finds it dripping down his spine. He imagines all the places George could be, but doesn't let his mind wander too far.

He doesn't notice all the time that's passed until he sees a clue of sunlight peek over the horizon, sending soft rays through his windows. He lets his eyes shut for a moment, bathes silently in it, before he's pulling himself from the bed and starting toward the bathroom.

Cold water soaks his skin, catching on prominent eye bags. Dream runs a hand through jagged hair and washes away the taste of night on his tongue. He scatters to his room once more, not bothering to replace his ratty t-shirt and baggy bottoms before he's storming down the hall.

The cool marbled floors bite into his heels as he winds through the house, soon flying down the stairs. His stomach twists with anticipation and he brushes past vacant room after vacant room in search of some form of life. The first he finds is an employee dusting unused furniture.

She holds a quiet face brushed with the bare hint of wrinkles. Satin hair is tied behind her head, her eyes soft and round. Delicate fingers clutch around a wooden handle and control the swift movement of feathers.

"Are my parents awake?" he asks carefully, attempting to hide his urgency.

Her gaze lifts from the smooth wooden surface of a bookcase, regarding him with gentle surprise. "I'm afraid not."

He swallows, eyes flitting to the ground. "Have you heard anything?"

"Pardon?"

"George," he gasps out, meeting her eyes once more and demanding honesty, "About George."

Her face falls ever so slightly, pulled down by pity. His stomach turns, hands growing shaky.

"I'm sorry," she says lowly, "He hasn't come home, yet."

He should've known. He should've known when no one came to wake him, after his mother promised he'd be the first to know. But it still hurts all the same.

Dream's throat closes and he can't do anything but nod and turn away, retrace his steps as he wanders through the house once more. This time slowed by the weight of disappointment, this time quieted by burning thoughts.

It's a bit difficult to own a mind ruled by someone else. Pretty boy sits on a throne in the forefront of Dream's mind at all times, wicked crown placed upon his head.

With each hour that passes, Dream's hope wilts further, feeding his worry. He'd been too nauseous to eat and too frightened to sleep. It was clear in the pale shade of his lips and the worn skin of his face, clear in the way he blinked languidly and spoke softly. He almost wanted to be angry at George, in part because he was tired of being angry at himself. He couldn't bring himself to, though.

So now, stashed within shadows and the angles of his face dipped in bronze candlelight, he tears himself apart. The exhausted blaze in his eyes bares a hint of what lies behind them. Tumbling thoughts and a heavy conscious. His arms are folded tight over his chest, jaw clenched as his nails dig into the papery skin of his palms. The thick black shadows end where a blood red rug starts, and crawl up the backs of plump sofas. No windows, the room suffocates, thin words piling high.

"It's just so unlike George," a shrill voice comments, "He's never been one to...to chase after danger." Monty nods, smoothing a hand over the small of her back.

"We've been worried sick," he thunders lowly, "Had people searching all morning."

Dream's eyes slip shut, shoulder digging into the sharp corner of a bookcase. Wispy flames lick the stale air, leaving droplets along his cheekbones. The crackling of a bigger fire pounds at his skull.

"I just have no idea where he could've gone. And for this long, I—I hope not too far."

"That's the best we can do right now, hope."

Dream's fist curls further.

"I just wonder what could've caused this," his own mother taunts, "Did he say anything, did anything happen, before?"

"He'd been maybe a bit off, for a little. But no, nothing drastic. Last we heard he—he was going to..."

There's a lull in conversation, and it scratches at Dream's veins. His eyes flick open, finding four pairs set on him, tugging on his skin.

"Dream?"

He blinks slowly, swallows thickly. "Sorry?"

"Did anything happen while you two were together, Dream?" his mother prods, "Anything that could've caused this?"

Dream shifts on his feet, his eyes landing on the floor. The corners of his lips dip low, eyebrows pinched and digging into his forehead. "No, no I..." a weight drops in his chest, "I don't know."

"You were the last person to see him," George's mother reminds, the thump of Dream's heartbeat growing louder, heavier, "Did he seem at all different?"

Dream's face lifts but his gaze doesn't reach the gallery of prying eyes, instead settles on burgundy wallpaper. "I don't...maybe, I don't...I don't know."

"Try, Dream. Please."

His hands fall to his sides, eyes skittering to the group and tainted with panic. "I'm sorry," he breathes, taking a step away. A few more steps and his hand is reaching out to wrap around cold brass. "I'm sorry, I don't know."

The door is pulled open and Dream slips through the cracks, skin ripping from the grasp of their gaze. He doesn't go far, presses his back to a wall a few feet down from the door. He kneads the heels of his hands into his eyes, willing a fragile prince to appear before him when he opens them.

Do you miss me, George?

As much as I miss you?

How could you leave?

Of course, he's not alone for long. Silence is broken by swaying doors and the clicking of heels against marble. Dream pulls his hands away from his face, leaving it tired and honest. Sleepless bruises melded into fair skin and glassy eyes stroked by crimson.

"Dream," his mother asks softly, laying a hand over his bicep. Her second hand comes up to cup his face, doe eyes prodding at him, "Are you alright, darling?"

It feels like when he was a kid. When he would get into trouble and his mother would have to coax a confession out of him.

"You can tell me," she spurs. He gives in.

"We got into a fight," his lips pour, a tear slipping with the words, "We got into a fight before he left. I'd said something I didn't mean."

His mother's face pulls into sorrow as she nods, fingers slipping up to draw stray hair away from his forehead.

"I didn't mean to hurt him," Dream gasps, "I wouldn't. I never wanted to hurt him. It was an accident, Mom."

"I know, love," she soothes.

"It's my fault, isn't it? It's my fault. God, I feel so terrible. I did this."

"No, you don't know that, Dream."

"They'll be so angry with me," he persists, "*He'll* be so angry with me. I've ruined it, I *always*—always..."

She traces the side of his face, "It will be alright, dear. He'll come back. He'll forgive you."

Dream's hand clutches around her elbow as he shakes his head, another tear slipping. "Can we just go home, please?" he shudders.

She nods slowly, retracting her hands from his face and mumbling something about his father. Then she's out of reach, starting down the hall once more. So Dream tears himself from the wall.

With each step, his mind thunders. It echoes through his skull. The dull beat of a now familiar soundtrack. *I believed it, it sings. I believe you. You believe you.*

It's my fault. It's my fault. It's my fault.

I did this.

It's my fault he's gone.

Dream should rest. Take care of himself, maybe. And he knows this. *But*, what sounds much more appealing is the sparkling liquor on the top shelf of his parent's cellar. The heavy bottle, enough to make his brain sink. Maybe, it would quiet his thoughts. He should like to test this theory.

So he plucks the glass from its podium and admires the amber nectar in its temporary cage. Then he's grabbing a glass and releasing the poison. It's enchanting to feel it slosh against the sides of crystal walls in the sturdy grip of his hand, even more so to feel it wash down his throat. However, he downs all of two glasses before he decides that's too much work and simply steals the whole bottle, leaving the glass empty on a lonesome table.

He carries it out of the room, entering a hallway wrapped in shadows and starlight. And he nearly laughs at the spectacle above him, artificial nature in the form of flaunted wealth. He hates ceilings, he decides. They're always too tall, and they always hide the sky, and they always entrap him, and why would you need art on the ceiling anyway, no one looks at it. So he stumbles down the hallway with judging eyes and sticky lips.

Then again. George had looked at it. Dream takes another swig, fingers tight around the neck of the bottle. *George, George, George.*

The boy's a menace, really. Making Dream all attached to him like this and then running away. Dream really shouldn't be. Attached, that is. This is bad for him.

George had noticed the faint flowers dancing on the ceiling. In an effort to alleviate the tension he'd complimented them. His voice rings through Dream's head as a memory. Dream really misses him.

He shouldn't just stand here, should he? Waiting for the boy to be found.

His feet carry him while his mind chants once more. *I'm not angry, Dream.* He latches on to the memory, to the sound of his name carried on George's lips. *I just have to deal with it.*

He reaches the end of the hallway, a frown and a bottle pressed to his mouth. Then he's wandering past stairs, and then he's laying a hand over the gold arch of a door handle, and then he's meeting the flower bushes of his front garden webbed with dark. Moonlight cast upon him and wicked fuel coursing through his veins, he starts down the steps.

He searches helplessly, the image of George and the night prominent in his mind. The boy's feet tracing dim pathways and his delicate fingers scraping against stone. Dream holds onto the idea

that at least, they share the same moon. He looks up to it and imagines George doing the same, eyes wide and full of silver. He never looks at it for long, though, mind buzzing dully as he strains his eyes to scour the area. At some point, he sets his bottle down on some curb and forgets that it's there.

He twirls his fingers in thin fog as his eyelids begin to grow heavy. The night is cold, sharp wintry air poured over his skin and painting it fuchsia. But he rubs his eyes awake and tucks his hands into his pockets and continues on. It's quiet and lonely but so is George, he supposes. And he doesn't like that so he continues on.

He only gives up when all he can feel are his fingertips. His body is numb through and through, beaten by the cold. And so with a defeated sigh and glassy eyes, he turns around, gracelessly waltzing back toward home.

The low drum of his shoes against pavement is haunting, the sound of failure. And the moon only hurts, now, stings his skin in reprimand. He'll nod silently at it and squeeze his eyes shut.

When his eyes catch on the soft clue of porch lights, yellow falling through the cracks of the gate a few feet away, he comes to a stop. His chest instantly swells with warmth at the sight of the boy all alone before his house.

He stands in the patch of faded light, just on the edge of dark. His jaw is inclined, chin pointing toward the top of the house. His skin is milk and his eyes are honey. Lavender eye bags are an obvious sign of loud nights. Ebony lashes blink slowly over heavy amber irises. They hold something like sadness, maybe a bit of fear. Desperation. The whites of his eyes are stained vermillion and incredibly worn. His lips are fragile rose petals pressed into a thin line. His hair is a messy pile of dark waves, falling into his eyes and stroking his ears.

He stares with wide eyes at the house, fidgeting with his fingers. He looks hurt and hopeless, shrunk by the night and lack of sleep. Dream's throat runs dry, and for many moments he can only watch.

"George?"

The boy's eyes widen further and his gaze immediately snaps toward the voice. When he recognizes Dream, torn up and awe-filled Dream, his eyes soften. Dream's fingertips tingle, his breaths labored as he simply stares.

"What're you doing out here?" George asks carefully. His voice is rougher, not quite the crushed velvet Dream remembers.

Dream can't help the small hint of a smile that touches his lips, though it doesn't reach his eyes. "What do you think?"

George looks down at his hands, his own lips twisting into a frown. "Yeah," he whispers, "Sorry."

Without another thought Dream rushes forward, closes the gap between them as he pulls George close. He holds on tight, to make sure he's real and to make sure he never slips away again. He'd almost forgotten how this felt. And now, after so long, it's like a tidal wave of everything good rushing through his veins and crashing down on his heart.

He feels sobs against his chest, can't help the mound of tears that crush his own face. He reaches a hand up to thread it through George's hair, gentle fingertips combing loose strands. And for the first time in days, he feels alright.

"Holy shit," he murmurs against the top of his head, huffing a small laugh, "Never do that again."

His arms release narrow shoulders so his hands can cup George's shattered face, so his thumbs can trace the quiet bruises beneath his eyes. His cheeks are now streaked with shiny trails left by tears, his eyelashes sticky.

"When was the last time you got some sleep," he asks lightly, chest heavy. George merely glances downward, chewing on his bottom lip. Dream's stomach turns. "I missed you," he tries again, "I missed you a lot, dickhead."

That earns him George's gaze once again, this time dipped in wonder. "You too," he breathes.

"Why'd you come here?" Dream blurts out, "Your parents, they're really worried about you. Why didn't you go see them?"

George shakes his head, hands clutching harder around the fabric by Dream's waist. "I don't want to go home, Dream. I can't. They'll be so upset with me. And they'll want an explanation, I...I don't..."

Dream runs his thumb over George's lips, feels his breath stutter against his skin. "What is the explanation?" he pries carefully.

George hesitates, glances away for a moment. "Not...not now. Please."

Dream swallows, stomach twisting. "We should at least tell them you're okay, you know."

"They'll want to see me," George pleads, eyes turning desperate again, "I want to see you, Dream. Please."

Well fuck.

"Okay," he blurts, heart stammering, "Okay. Let's go inside, yeah?"

George glances toward the house, "Are your parents awake?"

"Yes," he admits slowly, "But we'll be quiet enough. They're in their room, anyway. It's freezing out here."

George closes his eyes, nods silently. And then Dream's grabbing his hand and lugging him toward the house.

They slip through the door carefully, Dream closing it with just enough force to not make a sound. He leads George past the stairs, down the main hallway of the house, until they reach a dark and empty room. He flicks the lights on and without a word starts toward a set of cabinets.

"What're we doing here?" George asks, panicked, "I thought we were going to your room."

Dream plucks a tall crystal glass from a shelf, closing the door and spinning around to face George. "When's the last time you had something to eat?" George only stares, which Dream takes as answer enough. "It's alright, George, the kitchen staff left hours ago and no one else uses it."

He fills the glass with icy tap water and sets it down on the island in front of George. Then he's tugging the fridge open and sorting through the full compartments, pulling out the best option he finds.

When he places that in front of George too, the boy merely responds with, "I'm not hungry."

Dream rolls his eyes. "Bullshit."

"Really," George insists, "I'm not."

"George."

"I'm not," George repeats, quieter. Dream pauses, watches for a moment before he sighs. He grabs the meal and tosses it back in the fridge in defeat.

"Grab your water, then," he murmurs, heading for the door once more.

They trail noiselessly through the house, up the stairs, and down another hallway, reaching Dream's room a few minutes later. He shuts the door behind them while George sets his glass on the bedside table. Dream regards him once, observes his state, before he's wandering towards his closet.

He reenters the room with a bundle of clothes in his hands, finding George exactly where he left him. He places the pile in George's arms and points toward the door on the back wall.

"You can change in the bathroom."

George blinks at the fabric, then glances up at Dream. His eyes are sweet. "Thank you."

Dream nearly forgets how to speak for a moment, has to turn away. "Let's just hope they fit."

Maybe—and Dream did not anticipate this—it's a bit endearing to see George in his clothes. Maybe he feels a butterfly or two invade his stomach. If anyone asked, he would deny it.

The soft black fabric of a t-shirt falls loosely over his shoulders, the neckline a bit too wide and revealing his collarbones. Dream had given him the only pair of sweatpants he owned, ones that bunch up at George's ankles. And at Dream's poorly muffled laughter, he glares.

"Dream," he scolds.

"Hm?" Dream answers, faux-innocence in his tone and on his face. George simply shakes his head, stumbling toward the empty side of the bed. He sits down on the edge, beginning to sip slowly at his glass.

"Have you been drinking?" he asks.

Dream pauses at that. "Uh."

George faces him, eyebrows raised. "Your smell of alcohol." Dream holds his gaze but says nothing. "Is it...is it because of me?" George prods.

Dream's eyes flit toward the ceiling and he folds his hands over his stomach. "Of course it is."

Silence creeps into their conversation. Dream takes the opportunity to hush a question in his whirring mind.

"Where'd you go, George?"

Still, the boy remains quiet, eyes falling to the sheets. Dream waits but the silence drags on.

He sighs, biting at the corner of his lip. "Listen, I...I can't let you stay the night."

George's breath deepens ever so slightly. "Why not?"

"Your parents really miss you," Dream says, "It would be wrong, I mean, they're your parents. And do you know how much trouble we would get in if we're caught?"

"I just need time," George begs, "Just to figure out what to say. Just tonight. Please, Dream."

"Just tell them the truth," Dream dares. George falls silent and so Dream turns to him again. His eyes are wild with desperation, lips flat.

"I can't."

"What is it, George?" Dream pleads, "Was it me? What I said? It was my fault, wasn't it?"

George's eyes flutter away. "It's not your fault."

"George."

"I'll tell you," George continues, "But you have to promise not to apologize."

Dream's heart drops. "George," he repeats, softer.

"Promise, Dream," George demands.

"Why?"

George's eyes find him once more, a gentle violence embedded in them. "Because it's not your fault. I promise."

Dream steadies his breathing, searching George's face. "Fine."

With that word, he loses sight of George, the boy turning away to hide as he starts. He exhales heavily, eyes wandering.

"I don't exactly like my house," he murmurs, "It's always too loud or too quiet."

His fingers drum anxiously against his glass. Dream finds himself wanting to reach out and calm the boy's nerves. He doesn't, though.

George glances down at his lap. "See, my mum wasn't a royal when she met my father. But he loved her anyway. And when they got married, it was quite the scandal. His parents were very angry with him."

Dream frowns, remembers the perfectly tainted faces of George's parents.

"So they did everything they could to prove that they were worthy enough. They put all of their energy into business and even more into perfecting their lives. It...it put a great strain on their marriage."

George pauses, blinks at the ripples in his glass.

"It started when I was young. Now they fight all the time," he mumbles, "I dread going home."

George turns to Dream again, eyes glossy and skin painted in the moonlight that spills in through the windows.

"The reason I try so hard is because of them," he admits, voice weak, "I think that maybe if I help them, if I," he wipes a tear away but another one falls in its place, "If I let them use me. For business, for—for their image. If I'm the perfect son, or...the perfect pawn, then maybe it would stop. It would ease some of the pressure. They could be happy again."

Dream feels something cold rip through him, ice drip down his spine as he stares in horror.

George wipes at his eyes once more, gazes emptily at the mattress. "Never let my own emotions get in the way."

"George," Dream breathes, voice a phantom.

"I never realized how much it affected me until you," George whispers, looking up again. His face is broken, shattered glass that once was seamless. "You forced me to look in the mirror. And the full weight of it hit me that day. After that, I just...I couldn't bring myself to go home. I'd have to pretend again, and I knew I couldn't. I felt stuck. I didn't have anywhere to go."

"Why didn't you come to me?" Dream asks softly, reaching out to tuck a strand of George's hair away, "You know I would've let you."

George shakes his head gently, "I didn't want you to see that much of me."

Dream frowns, voice small when he asks, "Why not?"

"I was embarrassed," George admits, "Besides, I wanted to be alone."

Dream's frown deepens. He drags his fingertips over the back of George's hand where it clutches his glass. "I wish you weren't."

George watches as Dream pries the hand away and slips his own into George's palm. Their fingers curl together like an instinct. "I know you do," George murmurs, "And I'm sorry for worrying you. But it's been a while since I've had time to myself, time like that. Time to think. I needed it, you know I did."

"Do you feel better?" Dream asks lowly.

George pauses, eyes burning into the spot where their skin touches. Then he meets Dream's gaze, irises shimmering. "I feel more myself," he whispers.

The corners of Dream's lips twist upward without thought, his own eyes probably far too gooey. "I really missed you."

George squeezes his hand tighter, despite the fact that Dream's crushes his in size. "I missed you."

They're quiet for a moment, simply let invisible walls fall away. Let days worth of loneliness heal.

"You look tired," Dream comments.

"I know," George answers weakly, setting his glass down to wipe the final remains of tears from his eyes. "I am."

"You can stay," Dream says. *I want you to stay.*

"Maybe I shouldn't. You're probably right," George mumbles.

"You need to rest," Dream defends. *Stay with me.*

George nods slowly and Dream feels relief flood through him, "Alright. Thank you."

"I'll just," Dream swallows, attempting to tug back his smile, "Change. I'll be right back."

Reluctantly, he tears his hand away and stands from the bed. He enters his closet once more, grabbing his neatly folded pajamas before heading for the bathroom. He dresses quickly, washes the taste of liquor from his mouth, and prays for a not-too-painful hangover.

He finds George curled around himself on the mattress, face quiet and breath steady. He's long been stolen by sleep, his world warped by dreams.

With a faded smile, Dream climbs in beside him and slips away too.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry chapters have been slower but at least this ones a little longer D:

Thank you for 2k hits you guys are so cool <33 As always leave a kudos if you want and comment your thoughts I love reading them. I'm thinking this is going to end up being 10 chapters but I suck at planning so nobody knows.

You're all lovely xoxo

Motion Sickness

Chapter Summary

"Oh. *Oh*."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream is one more interruption away from tearing his door off of its hinges.

At the first knock, he simply rubs his eyes and groans to himself, mind still foggy from sleep. The second knock comes a few moments later, after he's already noticed the worn but gentle boy beside him smothered in sheets.

It's a pretty sight, really. Dark lashes stark against fair skin, fluttering slightly with each smooth breath. Rosy lips calm and sweet. He would enjoy it for longer if he didn't remember *why* exactly George was in his bed and the person promptly rattling the door.

"Shit," he mutters, sitting up abruptly. He glances at the door, shouts a strangled, "Just a moment!" Then he's stroking an easy pattern down George's arm and murmuring softly but urgently, "George, hey. Wake up, George."

The boy stirs as Dream begins threading careful fingers through his hair.

"Dream?" a muffled voice inquires.

"Sorry! Just—one second!" his voice quiets once more, desperation clinging to it, "George."

His eyelashes flutter before his eyes open slowly, blinking at the sudden light.

"George, get up," Dream rushes. "C'mon, there's someone at the door."

"Oh," George mumbles, kneading his eyes. He sits up slowly, "Um."

"The bathroom," Dream instructs, extending a finger toward the door.

George hesitates, still processing Dream's words halfway between sleep and wake. Dream grows more impatient with each flat second. Finally, he gives in and tears himself from the bed, stumbling toward the other side. George watches him with confusion that turns to surprise when Dream slips his arms under the boy's knees and back, hauling him upward.

"What—"

"Shh," Dream hisses, starting toward the bathroom as quickly as he can. He tugs George through the doorway, careful not to underestimate their fit. He dumps George on the edge of the bathtub with a mocking, "There you go, princess," and a small smile before he's disappearing into his room once again.

When he reenters he clears his throat, straightening himself out. "Come in!" he calls unsteadily.

The door slides open to reveal a wary Cecille. She quickly smoothes her features out, though, voice even, "My apologies," she says, "Your mother wanted me to tell you that breakfast is ready."

He glances at the clock, finding that he had slept in later than usual, his routine lost to the presence of an exhaust-drenched boy. "Sorry, yeah, I'll be right down. Thank you."

She nods, face turning solemn all of a sudden. "And, Dream," she says gently.

Something swirls low in his stomach, a frown forming on his face. "Yes?"

She pauses, studying him for a moment. "They haven't found him yet."

It curls further, tightening his throat. "Oh," he answers, voice strangled and odd, "Yeah, um...thanks...for letting me know."

"I'm sorry."

"Mhm," he squeaks.

She regards him for a moment longer before nodding, frown deeper. She shuts the door once more, exit marked by the clatter of footsteps down the hall. Dream drags a hand over his face, sighs into his palm.

It's a mess, really. He almost regrets letting George spend the night, but he knows the opposite was never in the realm of possibility.

"Haven't found him, huh?" George hums, voice dripping a lower velvet from weariness.

Dream turns, expression lopsided. "Told you this was a bad idea."

"You're the one who ended up insisting I stay." Dream says nothing, eyes flickering away. "What's the plan, then?" George asks cleanly.

"Not sure," Dream murmurs, "I don't want you to walk home all by yourself."

George blinks slowly, his eyes carrying a soft smile. "I can manage."

His dark hair is ruffled jaggedly, painting the boy with gentle innocence. It's combatted by the still ripe bruises beneath his eyes.

"What will you tell them?" Dream asks.

George sighs, straightens from where he stands leaned against the doorway. "I...I don't know."

"Did you get enough sleep?" Dream presses.

"Probably not."

Dream's lips twist into a guilty frown. "Sorry," he answers, "I sort of forgot, about...everything else, and...well, sorry."

George shakes his head, "Don't worry about it."

There's a pause. Dream feels the silence envelop him, oddly different. He suddenly grows unsure.

"Okay. Well, I'll sneak you out the side, if...if you're ready to go," he announces, eyes skittering

away again.

George nods, stepping into the room, "I'll just change."

"Really?" Dream blurts, "Into your worn clothes?"

George continues his path toward his side of the bed, merely throwing a glance toward Dream. "I can't show up wearing someone else's."

Dream scans him, thin and soft and swallowed whole by Dream's baggy shirt and sweatpants. "Oh. Right."

George collects his pile of clothes from beside the bed and disappears once more into the bathroom, Dream left to wade through quiet.

He's not exactly ready to let George go yet, not exactly willing to send him back to the empty excuse of a home. To be entirely honest, Dream wishes he could fix everything for George. Mend every imperfection he's been dealt or simply steal it for himself. Just to lift something from the boy's weighted heart.

Because where the similarity of their lives parts into two different paths, George's road is dimmer. Because the difference between them is that George would let people take from him even if he was a step away from ashes. He would give every ounce of himself to make another happy. And it destroys him.

When George appears again, Dream remains quiet. His throat feels strangled, choked. Apparently, it's obvious.

"Are you alright?" George asks carefully. Dream simply nods as George comes to a stop in front of him, face still puzzled. He lays the borrowed clothes in Dream's hands. He peers at Dream through thick lashes, curiosity embedded somewhere within the worry. "Dream?" he pries, "What's wrong?"

Dream dumps the pile on the bed and shakes his head. "Nothing. C'mon."

He starts slowly toward the set of doors, George trailing behind. The door opens a sliver and Dream pokes his head out, glancing down either end of the hall. Then he steps out into the open, caution steady in his eyes. He takes a step toward the end he wouldn't normally go down, opposite to the one that leads to swirling stairs and a bulky mahogany door.

They pass quietly over the smooth floor, anxiousness wound tight in their stomachs. The end of the hallway fades into a small spiral staircase that Dream leads them down. The house is quiet save for occasional distant footsteps.

They wind down another hallway, flinching at every small noise. It's soon cut off by a tall glass door that they slip through wordlessly. A few feet ahead lies an ivy-patterned fence, a narrow gate tucked within it. With each step closer to it Dream grows hollow.

When they reach it George turns to face him, irises crystalline. "Thank you," he murmurs, "Really. For everything."

Dream's gaze drops, his hand reaching out mindlessly to wrap around George's. His satin skin is pale over fragile knuckles. "You'll come over as soon as you can?"

Faint laughter touches George's eyes. "Might be a while."

Dream grins slightly. He glances up again, George's gaze having never left him. "You're such a shithead."

"I haven't seen my family in three days, they're bound to hog me for a little," George replies, voice bittersweet.

"How high on the list do you think fiancé lands?" Dream teases.

George hesitates, slightly taken aback by the word. "Hm. Maybe not so long after all," he answers.

"You'll have to pretend we haven't seen each other for days," Dream adds, huffing a small laugh.

George purses his lips and nods slightly, tone still light despite the weighted words when he says, "It's alright, I'm good at that."

It lands cold in Dream's heart, his face falling with it. He holds George's hand tighter. "It's okay to take a step back, y'know," he pleads earnestly, "You can't carry this all by yourself. You can't—you can't fix it. No matter how hard you try. It's theirs, George, and this is only hurting you."

George falls silent, his eyes descending. The quiet catches on evergreen leaves, webs within the trees. The soft hills painted in the distance mark where George would fade away.

His hand is tugged away when he takes a step back. He glances at Dream once more before turning around, genuine and apologetic. His words flutter in the air, the only sign he'd been there, a soft, "Goodbye, Dream."

Dream's fingers drum anxiously where they lay in his lap, longing for a small hand to wrap around. It'd been two days without the boy. Dream was frightened by the idea of ever letting him go home again after hearing how far the cruelty of his parents' extends. But two days of him stuck in the horrific house, surely being prodded for answers and coddled because of an incident they'd partly caused, Dream felt more nauseous than anything.

The rocking of the carriage comes to a stop and the small window reveals the towering walls of George's home. Dream feels his unease grow more prominent as he steps outside, following his parents.

They wind through the garden of thorn bushes, Dream keeping his face blank. They waltz up smooth steps and Dream's father is soon rapping the door knocker against thick wood, Dream fidgeting with the cuff of his suit jacket. When the door opens it reveals a pristine employee who welcomes them in easily.

Dream glances around the vast room though he knows he won't find what he's looking for. They're led down a wide corridor into a plum parlor room, one also filled with vacancy. While his parents settle on a plush sofa and accept offered tea, Dream refuses to sit nor does he tear his eyes from the door.

The minutes trail on, Dream's stomach winding tighter with each one that passes.

"Dream?" his mother asks, voice gentle.

He glances toward her reluctantly, his own voice strained, "Yes?"

Her face is worried, the expression making Dream's skin itch. "Would you like some tea?"

Dream shakes his head, "No, thanks."

"Have something to drink, dear," she presses.

"I don't want anything," he insists, his mind on the tumbling feeling in his stomach.

She sighs, unconvinced, "Dream—"

The door flies open then, Dream's eyes instantly snapping toward it. The wicked face of Monty steps through, a slender woman with crimson painted lips by his side. Behind them, George.

His lips are stuck in a tight line, eyes anxiety-ridden. They creep around the room before settling on Dream and instantly they go soft. Dream feels the subconscious gesture tug at his heart and he lets a small smile light his lips. His feet promptly start toward the boy, passing easily over smooth wooden floors.

George's skin still holds the faint reminder of sleepless bruises, still not entirely washed away which worries Dream. His hair is fluffy and dark, loosely combed over his head.

Dream's smile grows an inch wider as he wraps his arms around George's shoulders securely and stuffs his face into the top of the boy's head. George's own arms fall around Dream's waist with grace.

They hold each other naturally for a moment longer, Dream only prying his arms away to slip both of his hands into George's. George stares up at him with fragile wonder, the euphoric color of his gaze making Dream dizzy. He dips down so his lips are hovering beside the boy's ear, eyes giddy.

His voice is low and soft, dancing in the small space between them, "It's been too long, Prince."

He pulls away to catch George's eyelashes flutter, his usually steady breath stuttering. Dream grins in delight, but it instantly vanishes when George glances over Dream's shoulder and mutters a careful, "Kiss me."

Dream's face is distorted into shock and light fear, his chest tightening. "What?"

"You haven't seen me in five days," George says, voice hushed but urgent, "Make it believable."

Dream feels his unease return tenfold. It hurts worse when he realizes *why*, when his spinning head falls silent save for one thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knows he saw it coming. But somehow that makes it worse.

He wants it for them. He wants desperately to obey and to let their lips fall into place together. But not here, not now. He wants it wrapped in privacy, he wants it *just* for them. But George doesn't. George is willing to let their first kiss go to waste, to use it for show. Clearly, he doesn't feel the same. And Dream feels like an idiot.

Maybe none of it was real. Maybe it was all for show. That was the deal, wasn't it?

George will be kind and George will be honest because they're friends, that's all. And the times that he reaches further, seems to cross that line, it's for the sake of his parents, of course it is. *Dream* was the one who stumbled blindly past the line, all alone, George simply withheld their agreement.

George was simply looking out for his family.

Dream releases one of George's hands to press two fingers beneath his chin. He tilts his face up, closer. George's eyes turn faintly to panic, like he didn't think this far ahead, like he didn't expect Dream to actually follow through. But he lets himself fall pliant in Dream's grip.

They're close, close enough. Dream can feel hot air strike his skin and the pressure of George's lips just by his. His heart sinks at the thought of giving in, because he's a fool anyway and this may be his only chance. To lock them together, if only for a moment. Maybe then George would feel it. Maybe his breath would catch on the shape of Dream's lips, maybe his heart would fall as far as Dream's has, maybe it'd be honesty tucked in a disguise transparent enough for the both of them.

He searches George's eyes earnestly, imploring. Wishing and wishing that he could do it. But.

"Stop doing things for them," he murmurs, voice wounded.

This isn't George. This isn't real.

He lets his hands fall away as he takes a step back, sending George a look of shattered glass and fiery acrylics. His eyes blaze softly, anger overpowered by hurt. George's own eyes are now tinged with embarrassment, gaping at Dream.

Dream turns before George sees too much, reaches what lies beneath the surface. He drifts toward the array of sofas once more where their parents have started conversation. His face is openly painted with hurt, stomach swirling with it.

Dream places himself beside his parents, George soon sitting beside his own as well. Dream is purposeful in avoiding any interaction with George, refuses to let George paint them as the perfect couple again. He lets George writhe in the blatant mess they've laid before his parents.

They both remain quiet where they sit, Dream's face void though he pretends to listen to the conversation of their parents. George simply stares at the floor, eyes wildly sad.

Dream is swallowed whole and torn apart by it all.

Eventually, Dream's mother grants them permission to have time for themselves, though Dream's not sure if he wants it anymore. Shame slithers loudly through his veins, for it's always shame that follows hope, isn't it? But he stands anyway, offers his hand to George where he still sits on the sofa across from theirs. The boy rises slowly and laces their fingers together, Dream pulling them toward the door without another glance in his direction.

When they slip past the door Dream lets his hand fall away, stepping idly toward a quiet hall. The air sits stale and empty, Dream withering under the feeling of George's eyes burning into his back.

"I'm sorry I made you uncomfortable earlier," George says, his voice instantly igniting Dream's skin, "It was a ridiculous thing to say."

Dream feels the same blue pain scathe his heart. His eyes drop to the floor, worn. Ridiculous, ridiculous, ridiculous.

"I don't understand why you still care so much," he answers, attempting to keep his voice steady, "Why you still try so hard for them. I thought you hated it."

George says nothing and so Dream turns to face him again, only receiving an apologetic look. He leans back against a wall of the hallway, a sigh pouring from his lips. His heart gives in too easily,

the sapphire weight of George's eyes rendering it weak.

"How's it been these past couple days?" he asks, gentler, "How have they treated you?"

George tucks a stray strand of hair back into place, lips pursed in dismay. "They ask me a lot of questions," he murmurs, "Things I don't have the answers to. I don't get very much time alone, now. They're worried about me," his eyes flit away, unsure, "Though it's a little late."

Dream's stomach twists, a frown soaking his features. George meets his gaze again.

"I just wish it could all be over," he admits lowly.

Dream nods, reaching a hand out to wrap slender fingers around his wrist, thumb brushing over fair skin. "I'll be here," he whispers, and he hates how honest the words are.

I'll be here, whenever you need me.

If you want me, if you don't.

I'll be here even if you don't feel the same.

Dream's fingers tear away, his eyes turning toward the other end of the hall.

"There's only a few more weeks until the wedding," he says, hoping his voice sounds light enough, "Isn't that crazy?"

He only hears the quiet shuffle of feet in response, feels a bicep brush against his. His arm wraps around the small waist easily as George's head falls into place against his shoulder.

You'll be mine.

He lays his own head against George's, eyes tracing swirling patterns in the pale wallpaper while his heart aches dutifully.

Isn't that crazy?

It had seeped steadily into his bloodstream. quiet admiration that grew louder with each passing day. Now, it blares painfully through his skull.

Like how he attempts to think nothing of it when George's gentle fingers dance against his palm before curling over his knuckles, attempts to continue to focus on the crystal cases before them. Instead, he ends up brushing his thumb over the back of George's hand and fighting the urge to meet the boy's gaze, afraid his eyes will reveal too much. He gives in, though, and his chest instantly bubbles with warmth at the soft smile in George's eyes. He glances away quickly, his own smile growing far too wide.

Maybe the smart, responsible thing to do would be to distance himself. They are to be married, after all, and it'll only be more difficult when they're living together and Dream is smothering unrequited feelings. He's never been one for responsibility, though. He'll let it eat away at him if it means he still gets to spend time with George.

They pass another row of cases laid out on top of a narrow table and are led through an arched doorway. The room they enter is small, only holds a round table dressed in ivory cloth and large iridescent windows. Dream and George sit side by side, their parents claiming the chairs across from them. Their hands are reluctantly pulled apart.

"This is silly," Dream mutters, tugging at his collar, "It's cake, it'll taste good no matter what."

"Are you really complaining about getting to taste cake for an evening?" George hums, folding a napkin over his lap.

"I'd rather be in bed," Dream counters, "In sweatpants. Where I don't have to pretend to be all *noble* and whatnot." He plucks the first button of his shirt open in distaste.

"That's unfortunate," George answers, voice tinged with sarcasm, "Guess I probably shouldn't remind you we have to meet with Ricky after this."

Dream groans, kneading his face exasperatedly. "I mean, really," he complains, voice muffled, "No one else does this. I thought weddings were supposed to be fun."

Dream's fingers tear away from his skin just as George places a comforting hand over his thigh. "It's not so bad," he says, but it feels like a question.

Dream meets his eyes, the tawny irises unsure. "No, I," he stumbles over words, searches for the best way to say *it's not you*. Though it had been him, at one point, Dream recalls faintly. The vacant face of a stranger hurt by his careless words. The low melody of his voice *agreeing*. Had it been easier then, when they despised each other? Dream hurt less, surely, when he wasn't crushing on someone far out of his league. Then again, George had hurt more.

I get it, Dream.

"I just prefer simplicity," Dream mends, "Like, like when we're stuffed away in my room. Alone. It's...it's easy."

George holds his gaze for a moment, quiet and searching, while Dream catches his rambling words and mentally smacks himself. George says nothing when he retracts his hand and faces forward again.

The room is soon swarmed by a parade of small china plates and a buttercream frosted cake that's placed in the center of the table. Six slices are cut from it, one for each guest at the table. Dream scoffs at the formality of it all.

And the routine continues, a new cake and new dishes carried in every few minutes. They're usually decorated with pastel flora and thin frosting, the cake itself ranging anywhere from red velvet to vanilla. They've tried all of five cakes before Dream gets bored.

"They all taste the same," he declares, folding his arms over his chest as he sits back in his seat. "Cake is cake. This is pointless."

"You're being dramatic," George replies, taking a bite from the piece in front of him.

"I want to go *home*," Dream grumbles, dragging out the last word.

"You're a drama queen."

Dream eyes George with a playful glare, the boy answering it with grinning eyes. And Dream

decides that's enough, really. He wants it to extend past George's eyes, to light up his face and catch in the soft shape of his lips. He wants it bright and honest and Dream wants to see it clearly.

He tears his gaze away, staring at the piece of cake before him once more. He drums his fingers against the table as mindless chatter from across the table brushes his ears. Under ripe daylight the room is happy.

"No one besides you would be this mopey about eating cake," George teases, dabbing his lips with the cloth napkin.

Dream glances at him once again, eyes daring while George appears thoroughly proud. With a faint grin tugging at his lips, Dream lifts his index finger to scoop up a dollop of frosting and dashes it against the tip of George's nose.

While Dream attempts to muffle laughter, George's mouth falls open in shock, his gaze bewildered and stuck on Dream's smug face.

"Dream," he starts slowly.

Dream sucks the remaining frosting from his finger, smile sweet, "Hm?"

"You know, they spent a lot of time on these cakes," George scolds.

Dream doesn't answer, simply grabs another glob with his thumb and wipes it across the apple of George's cheek. George flinches away but to no avail.

"You're being impolite," he continues, voice smooth and lovely.

Dream only smears the excess on his thumb down the center of George's lips, eyes glittering. He reaches over to sweep more onto his index finger and is about to leave a trail of it on George's other cheek when a slender hand catches his wrist.

"Dream," he repeats, the glow of his eyes defeating the purpose of his tone, "You're going to get us in trouble."

Dream lowers his hand slightly, "With who?" he asks, "And don't say our parents."

George quiets, his eyes narrowing.

Dream leans closer, his voice falling low, "Relax," he murmurs, "Just for a moment, George. Let go. Forget about them."

The hand clamped around his wrist loosens. Dream's lips begin to drift up toward the side of George's face as an idea sparks in his mind. George's breaths grow deep.

"If it makes you feel any better, think of it this way," he hums, voice raw with bittersweet admiration, "The wedding's in a few weeks. We're here, fiancés, trying cake together," he places a small kiss on George's cheekbone, revels in the way it makes his breath hitch, "High on affection," he lifts his free hand to meet the one slightly curled in on itself on the tabletop. He spreads George's fingers open, slowly slips theirs together, "Can't keep our hands off of each other."

It could be real, his heart whispers.

He turns his head slightly to catch the flutter of George's eyelashes, nose brushing against the boy's satin skin. "Would your parents like that?" he breathes.

Would you?

He pulls away, hand leaving George's. The boy's eyes have darkened and Dream smiles wide, huffing a small laugh.

"You don't have to be *pristine prince* all the—"

His wrist is shoved forward, the frosting he forgot was on his finger plastered across his cheek. He flinches, attempts to dodge it, but it's too late. He blinks, eyes instantly darting toward George who's facing forward again, a gentle smile caressing his lips.

It's real. It's small, barely noticeable, but it's real. Tangible joy sticking to George's skin and crushing Dream's heart in all the right places.

George pulls the napkin from his lap to wipe the frosting clinging to his nose, lips, and cheek away. But Dream is one step ahead of him, a new dollop already on his finger and it's soon dashed across George's face again.

George sends him a glare that's challenged by his vague grin. He swipes at the layer of buttercream with his own thumb, lunging at Dream who's beaming wildly now. He swerves but it splatters across the side of his cheek anyway, George retreating quickly and twisting his face away, out of reach. But Dream, lucky his arms are so long and lanky, simply leans forward to wrap his arm around the boy's shoulders and drag more icing down the side of his face.

George swivels around once again, collecting frosting on his pointer finger and reaching for Dream's nose. This time Dream is successful at avoiding the attack, only because he shifts too far toward the edge of his chair and clatters to the floor, arms flailing and eyes wide. He lands hard on his arm and twists onto his back with a groan, finding vibrant eyes taunting him.

George's smile is smothered, an attempt at hiding it, but dimples are carved into his cheeks anyway. "Not so graceful," he patronizes. He sucks the frosting from his finger into his mouth, eyes soft honey and lulling.

Dream narrows his own eyes and not a moment later reaches up, grabbing George and tugging him to the floor. George huffs a heavy noise of surprise, crashing onto Dream's chest before he's rolled onto his back beside him. He pants exaggerated breaths, Dream gazing at the ceiling and attempting to catch his own while fighting a blazing smile as it rises in his chest. He's dizzied by giddiness and his hard fall, veins rich with candy.

"You're a menace," George grumbles, rubbing at his elbow in emphasis.

Dream beams with pride as he turns his head to meet the boy's reprimanding gaze. The air between them is knit tightly in the small space. "I think you like it," Dream teases.

George's gentle smile peeks through again, his irises turning velvet beneath thick lashes. Dream savors the state of him, takes in the unfamiliar expression his face adorns though he can't put a name to it. Buttercream still paints the graceful features of his face and Dream can feel his own skin still sticky.

The light turn upward of his mellow lips blooms butterflies in Dream's stomach, his heart touched by it and turned sickly sweet.

"Are you," Dream's gaze snaps toward the face above them, the young man jittery as he clears his throat on nerves, "Are you two alright?"

Dream cracks a grin, eyes sparkling. He presses his palms to the floor as he sits up, dusting his once-sharp suit off. "Yeah, sorry about that," he hums easily, George also lifting himself off the hardwood in his peripheral. He remains quiet as he runs a hand through jagged hair and straightens his jacket.

The man, bow-tie wound tightly around his neck, sends them one more unsure glance before he's skittering away. Pride bruises Dream's features, skin smooth and calm. He rises from the floor completely and extends a hand as an offering to George. The boy takes it with light eyes that, when he stands, instantly catch on something beyond Dream's shoulder. Dream twists around to find four pairs of eyes on them, puzzled and holding a glint of surprise.

Dream regards them for only a moment longer before he reaches over to pick up his napkin and turns to George once more, taking his chin between his fingers and tilting his head up. He begins wiping the pale frosting from the boy's cheeks, who gazes up at him with a mix of something like wonder and mischief.

"I apologize," he declares to the table, coating his voice with faux elegance, "We got a bit carried away. It was my fault, really."

He tears the napkin away and begins cleaning off his own face as he sits at the table again, only meeting the scrutiny of their gaze when every hint of frosting is wiped from his skin. George sits beside him, though he says nothing.

Their parents remain quiet, too, everyone seemingly impaired by the chaos. Though Dream bathes in it happily, thrives in the moment he's painted with reckless brushstrokes. He beams silently to himself, devilishly, and clears his throat as he folds his napkin over his lap.

"So," he announces to the empty air, "Cake?"

Chapter End Notes

FLUFF! You're welcome ^,^

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, we are nearing the end sadly but I'm excited to actually get them together :) Leave a kudos or a comment if you want, it is greatly appreciated <3 Follow me on Twitter, @yungluvXD

You're lovely xo

(Also thank you for 3k hits :D)

Tell-Tale Heart

Chapter Summary

Ooh, baby
You take me on a ride
Gonna drive me crazy
Ooh, baby
I feel like we've made it pretty far
Now we're stargazin'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream's parents had long ago given up on properly scolding him. Once he reached a certain age it was beyond their control, right? He was to mature on his own, pick his own path. Years of demands and reprimands are still drilled into his mind, though. A young mind is impressionable after all. But of course, there are things he chooses to disregard.

It had always been his mother, too. She was the one who got through to him. Dream was terrified of disappointing her by stepping out of line. He had adored her, maybe a part of him still does in the same naive way. But rosy lips faded to vermillion long ago.

Dream finishes looping his tie, straightening it with a light smile only brought about by the promise of seeing a certain prince. He gives himself one final once-over; artfully disheveled blonde hair and easy eyes, the innocent display of freckles contrasting the dark elegance of his suit. Silver wraps around his wrist and slender fingers, and as he deems himself put together enough, a knock tears his eyes from the mirror.

He strides toward the set of doors, adjusting thick brass cuff links along the way. With hesitant eyes, he pulls the door open, of course revealing the messenger of all things evil. Though her eyes are light, and they reveal nothing.

"Sorry, Cecille," Dream offers unsteadily, "I was just about to head down. Are they in the carriage already?"

She shakes her head slightly, the gesture small, "Actually, your mother requested a word with you."

Confusion presses into Dream's features, "Oh, uh...what for?" he inquires.

"She only told me you're to meet her in her room."

Dream's stomach turns. His parents' room had always been a place of secrecy, and he was only ever allowed in a few times. When he was young.

"Al—alright," he murmurs, "I'll be right there."

She nods, a bit of hesitance webbed in the gesture, and then she's turning and fading away down the hall. Dream lingers for a moment longer in the doorway. He drums his fingers against the cool

brass of the doorknob, chest winding tighter by the second. Finally, he tears his hand away and steps into the dark secrecy of narrow walls, trapped.

Dream wanders down, down, down the hallway, passing a pair of twirling staircases and far too many meaningless doors. The door of his parents' room lays tucked within shadows, a foreign place in his house. And he traces patterns in the wall, lets the clatter of his footsteps pound at his skull, for many minutes before he finds it.

He stops before an arched set of doors, tall and wide and engulfing the boy in front of them. His heart drums at his ears, though he raises his fist anyway, not a second later cracking down on the wood.

Dream's gaze wanders toward the soft glow at the end of the hallway, but it's far too late for an escape. The door swings open, the malevolent glow of eyes filling Dream's vision instead.

"You," he swallows, "You needed me?"

She smiles dimly, a Cheshire Cat grin. "Yes, come in, dear."

And with that, she steps to the side, Dream falling into the cage of a room wordlessly.

The master bedroom of the palace Dream faintly recalls as 'home' is unfamiliar. Of course, some part of him knows it. That part had been buried in his mind long ago, though now it threatens to climb to the surface.

The room is made of golden furniture, artificial flora engraved in every curve and stretch of material. The floors are dark wood and carry the thump of footsteps. The air is washed in dark and leaves Dream's skin on fire, a pair of large windows on the back wall suffocated by drawn velvet curtains. The only source of light comes from an obnoxious vanity.

His mother stills when she reaches it, seating herself on the plush stool not a moment later. Soft yellow pours onto her features, illuminates fair skin, a poised chin, and slender eyes. Dream remains in the dusk, on the edge of the spot of light and the dark of the rest of the room. The woman raises a powder brush and begins dusting her cheeks. Dream simply watches through the mirror, a thick crack striking through it.

"I noticed you've been spending more time with George," she starts, lacing the name with something like sweet venom. Dream frowns, his mother catching the gesture through the glass. "I think we all have," she adds.

Dream's chest twists. "Well, we're...yeah, we're good friends," he answers lowly.

She nods, closing the compact before her and picking up a new item to paint her face with. "When I met George, he was a rather quiet boy. Kind, polite, of course, but also an observer."

"You mean you met him before me?" Dream blurts.

She eyes him, "Yes, of course." He says nothing, and so she continues. "He's quite different now, isn't he?"

Dream raises a hand to curl his fingers around his collar, tugging at the tight fabric. "What do you mean?"

She sighs, quiet for a moment as her fingertips trail over different items on the vanity. "You tell me, Dream. What do you think of him now?"

Dream can't seem to figure out what she's getting at, can't pinpoint what path she's dragging him down. It only serves to close his throat tighter. "Um," he mumbles, voice strangled, "I—I don't know."

"It's a simple question," she scolds. When she doesn't elaborate further, only holds a distasteful glare, Dream takes it as his queue to stammer out an answer.

"I think he's...he's great. I enjoy spending time with him."

"Well, I figured as much," she mutters, screwing a tube shut, "You two sneak away often."

Dream chews the inside of his cheek, eyes piercing through the mirror.

"What do you do, when you're away?"

"Nothing," Dream murmurs, writhing under her gaze, "Just, talk."

"Okay," she drawls, "Do you know *why* we go to these events, Dream?"

He doesn't answer, words lost to the swirling pit in his stomach.

"These events aren't fun little get-togethers among friends," she says lowly.

Dream's mind fills in the blank dutifully.

"They're businesses looking for business partners."

She pauses, tucking a final product away and drawing a comb from a small drawer. Dream watches as he suffocates, the air emptied from his lungs long ago.

"Now, would you want to make a deal with someone so careless?" she wonders, dragging the comb through shiny strands of hair.

"No," Dream chokes out.

"No," she confirms, "Now, I know George," her eyes meet his in the mirror once more, "And I know that this is your doing, isn't it?"

He says nothing, though his mind races.

Her eyes fall away as she sets the comb down, "I didn't raise you like this."

"I'm sorry," he whispers.

She stands, bony and button-eyed as she turns to him. "It won't happen again."

He nods, suddenly feeling small.

"You'll behave at this party tonight," she declares, voice bruising, "And every event after. You won't so much as *step* out of line, and you certainly won't drag George along with you. Their family could still call off the marriage, you know. And we *won't* lose this deal."

He stares, veins rushing with poison and skin scarred.

"I've been asking you for years, Dream. I won't ask you again."

Too weak for words, Dream nods, not a moment later sent slipping toward the door once again. He

pries it open with shaky hands and meets a dim hallway that greets him wryly. He steps out, starting down the end he came from.

The thud of his heartbeat rings through the narrow corridor, tearing him apart. His fingers are numb, the sensation slowly spreading. His feet carry him mindlessly toward the end.

It'll never end, is his loudest thought. *It'll never end, it'll never end, it'll never end*. He pushes it away, only for it to echo back at him.

He desperately needs to rip his tie away and wrench his collar open, needs some room to breathe, but his hands won't move and his mind won't *stop*. It's maddening, and he quickly grows light-headed, nearly tripping over his own feet. His bloodstream ignites instead.

Dream only notices the tears when he's nearly reached the opening of the hallway. It's a few feet away, just out of reach, but instead of continuing toward the edge, he twists unsteadily around. His eyes dance across the walls and the ceiling, and when they fall to the now distant set of doors, it all rushes back. And he can't breathe.

Being here, being young, being *scared*. Scared of his parents, of all people, and being convinced they were protecting him. Dumb and innocent, he wandered down this hallway many times before, repeating to himself over and over a pattern of words that were practically tattooed to his ears and stained to his lips.

The tears slip, stumble down the slope of his cheeks, and ruin a constellation of freckles. He stutters on a rush of air that finds his parted lips. Dizzy, Dream takes a step backward. And another, and another, desperate for an end. His fingers find his hair and devastate the perfect array of smooth strands in favor of something to hold onto.

The world spins until his back collides with something smaller. Dream spins around instantly, hands falling to his sides. And of course, it's the kind, polite boy, his simple expression turning to dust when his eyes fall to the shimmering, bruised skin of Dream's face.

"Dream?" he asks, eyes wild and sad.

Dream's mouth opens though words are hard, and he falters for a moment as he pushes more tears away. "What're you doing here?" he breathes.

"I—" George inhales sharply, "I was meant to escort you. What happened, what..."

When Dream doesn't answer George takes a shallow step forward, Dream closing the distance by winding his arms around George's waist and burying his face in his shoulder.

George lets him, only wraps his own arms around Dream's neck and holds on tight. Dream's body racks with sobs as he hides the tears in George's shoulder. He feels fingers dance over his back, tracing patterns in the fabric. Then he's pulling away.

Dream raises a fist to brush the shine from his cheeks, swallowing the dry scratch in his throat, "Let's go to my room, yeah?"

George merely blinks and so Dream nods, taking his hand and dragging them both toward the opposite hall. They stride quietly past door after door, the gaze of George's eyes stinging Dream's skin though he tries to ignore it. Dream is more than relieved to finally disappear into the solitude of his room, even if that means having to face the boy by his side.

He drops the hand latched to his and steps further into the room alone, his fingers instantly finding

the knot at his throat. He begins quickly undoing it.

"Dream," George repeats from somewhere far behind him, voice small.

Dream glances over his shoulder at him, George's features painted with worry. His eyes catch the shoulder of George's jacket.

"Shit, sorry, I totally ruined your jacket," is all Dream says, voice simple, "You can borrow something if you'd like. It might be a bit big, though."

George barely glimpses at the spot before scoffing and shrugging the fabric off. "I don't care about the jacket."

Dream simply looks away, drawing the slender material of his tie from the collar. He drops it onto his bed, fingers quick to meet his buttons and pluck the first two open.

"*Dream.*"

He swallows, starts toward the full-length mirror to fix his hair. "What, George."

Soon George is by his side, but with a clenched jaw, Dream refuses to meet his eyes.

"Talk to me," George murmurs.

Dream schools a final strand into place and sighs, ready to turn away, "*I can't.*"

Gentle fingers wrap around his wrist, keeping him firmly in place. Dream's gaze lands over his shoulder once more. George's look is firm, the troubled pair of eyes blazing softly through Dream's skull.

"Believe me, George," Dream says lowly, "I wish I could. But we have to be at a party in a few minutes and I'm doing my *best* to keep it together."

George stares, his eyes wandering to the sticky trails left by tears on Dream's skin. George's eyes are soft, his fingertips the same when he reaches up to hold Dream's face in his hand. A spike of shock rushes through Dream, his breath faltering. As an instinct—or maybe desperate for something to hold onto—his hand comes to rest on George's waist.

It's surreal, the feel of George's hand around his jaw, mainly because Dream knows it's what he'd feel if George was pressed close, his lips even closer.

"You still want to go?" George asks, thumb brushing against Dream's cheekbone.

"I have to," is Dream's immediate answer. His eyes flick away as he swallows away the aftertaste of the words.

"We don't."

"George, *I have to.*"

George's eyes narrow, his hand falling to rest against Dream's chest. "What is it you're not telling me?"

"It's not about you," Dream answers, his own hand leaving George's side to pry George's away. He turns, headed for the bathroom and the cool splash of water.

"We could stay in," George offers.

"It's your party, you know we can't."

George pauses, the sound of running water filling the silence.

"It's my parents' party."

"It's your *family's*."

Dream reenters the room, some of the puffiness of his face soothed.

"We should go," he murmurs, "We'll be late." He picks George's jacket up from the edge of the bed, eyeing the darkened shoulder. "You think this is wearable?"

George steps toward him with weary eyes, tearing the jacket from his grip and pulling it on. "It's fine."

As soon as it's draped over George's shoulders Dream reaches for the door, cold brass biting into his skin. He pretends the feel of George's gaze on him doesn't tie his stomach into a thousand knots as he tugs it open and steps into the hall. He soon hears footsteps follow after him, heavy wood clicking shut a moment later.

The air is quiet save for the echo of heels against tile. Dream steers his mind away from vile memories and images from the last time they flew down this hallway, instead focuses on George's steady breath. And, when a small hand slides into his and lights every nerve on fire, he focuses on that, too. On the feel of skin against skin and the gentle pattern George's thumb brushes against the back of his hand.

Dream squeezes his palm as a silent "thank you".

The dead and vacant house Dream has grown such distaste for is nothing of the sort tonight. It's alight with the happy melody of piano, clinking glasses, endless chatter, and the wicked curl of laughter. The house is glowing under the attention and care put in for a party. Satin streamers, elegant bouquets, and candlelight wash the room in a color fit for hosting such high-maintenance guests. Overall, George's home is unrecognizable.

While suits and gowns meld into a blur, high-held hands carry platters of treats for their choosing. Most notably champagne, which catches Dream's eye immediately. He scoops one up from a passing waiter, sending the man a tight smile in the process. A sip is instantly thrown down his throat.

"I should probably greet some guests," George murmurs from below him, the sound nearly drowned out by a boisterous crowd.

"Alright," Dream answers, glancing around the room, "Where do we start?"

The house is full of mostly middle-aged guests, though some seem to be dipping into their twenties and others have a head of silver hair. What they all have in common, though, is a twisted smile and beady eyes.

When George says nothing Dream meets his gaze, the boy's eyes now narrowed and his lips pursed.

"Um, I suppose we could start by the door...then we'll work our way around."

Dream nods, though George's stare still feels unsure. "Is something wrong?"

George mutters a quiet, "No," but as he turns away, his face doesn't lighten. The flat line of his lips feels tense and his eyes appear bleak. Dream decides to ignore it.

So they start toward the entrance of the house, Dream wrapping an arm around George's waist while his opposite hand clutches at his drink. George drags him around as he expresses polite welcomes and words of gratitude, each accompanied by one of George's plastic smiles. Dream plasters on smiles, too, though he's sure his aren't as well calculated and stunning as George's. The two of them are the picture of perfect royalty, Dream's head spinning at the thought.

As for the guests, well, they never fail to make Dream's stomach twist. It's the greed tinting their sinister eyes and the arrogance distorting the crooked grin on their lips. Their skin is spoiled with thick jewels and satin and silk. The way they look at George sends fire through his veins, always preying. Precise words snake off their tongues and lure George in. The hand by his side seems to steadily grow tighter with each person they greet.

Eventually, George leads Dream toward the quietest space in the house rather than another guest. It still swarms with snooty nobles, though this area has more room to breathe. Dream has swapped his glass for a full one, and while they stand tucked away in the corner, he watches the bubbles that cling to it. Amber fizz and the promise of intoxication keep his mind busy.

He remains silent and keeps his eyes trained on the glass, awaiting further instruction from the pretty prince beside him because he's not sure what the proper thing to do at parties is. Normally, he complains from the sidelines and drains glass after glass of alcohol, relishing the way it burns his throat.

"Do you want to go?" George finally asks, though it's not what Dream was expecting. His voice is soft and sweet and accompanied by a hand on Dream's bicep.

Dream lifts his eyes from his drink, arching a brow at the boy. "Go?"

"As in...leave."

Dream frowns, looking away instantly. He watches the steady current of people invading George's house. "No, no, why...why would we do that?"

The hand on his arm falls away. "That's what we always do," George answers lowly.

Dream says nothing, eyes following the path made by a determined waiter. They drift to a pair of women with pearl-strangled necks laughing, then to a giddy man raising his glass. Then they land on his mother, watching him darkly, her stoic face malicious.

"Dream?" George asks.

He's stuck between a rock and a hard place, stuck between following his heart to George and following his mind to the demands of his mother. Yet all the while he feels blank. His ears ring while his mind goes silent and his features remain vacant. It nearly scares him.

"Dream," George repeats.

His eyes flick toward the boy, who seems worried, to say the least. Doe-eyed and frightened, George holds his gaze, waiting for an answer.

"We should go talk to some people," Dream says.

George's eyebrows knit together, "What?"

"Yeah," Dream continues, "When we...when we're married we're gonna need business partners, y'know?"

George pauses, eyes drilling through Dream's skull.

"No," he says slowly, "No, I don't know."

Dream makes a feeble attempt at a lighthearted laugh. "What do you mean, George? You're the businessman."

George clenches his jaw, glancing toward the crowd for a moment.

"Okay, but," his eyes plead and tug at Dream's skin, "I don't want to talk to them. I want to talk to you."

"We have to," Dream pushes.

"I want to stay here, Dream."

"We can't just *hide away* in the corner," Dream snaps.

"That's funny, because you've always been the one *demanding* we do as such," George bites back, "Why the sudden change of heart?"

Dream scoffs, falling silent as he turns away. George doesn't let down.

"What's wrong, Dream," he asks, voice gentler, now fragile.

"*Nothing—*"

"Don't give me that, you know it's not true."

Dream looks down at him once more, eyes softening. "We can't talk here," he says lowly, "Just, *please—*"

His eyes catch on something over George's shoulder, interrupting his train of thought. It clears his mind entirely, his irises lightening.

Beyond the crystal glass of a tall window, shards of iridescent water splinter through the night, puncturing the sapphire cushion of sky. They patter against the roof of the house, stain concrete, and cling to grass. The steady sound rings through Dream's ears warmly.

"George."

George frowns, eyeing him, "What is it?"

"It's raining," Dream mumbles.

George hesitates, turning to the window a few feet behind him once the words settle. Dream watches in silence, his fingertips aching to feel the shallow storm outside. But wrapped in tall walls and the demands of a party, he feels trapped.

George faces him again, his delicate fingers slowly locking with Dream's. "Let's go see it."

"I can't," Dream whispers.

George presses his forehead to Dream's shoulder, his thumb brushing against Dream's hand. The steady rhythm sends a shiver down Dream's spine.

"Is it your mum," George asks quietly, "I noticed she was watching us."

Dream's body flushes with sorrow at the memory of his mother's dark, empty room and her haunting gaze. At the threat of tears, he squeezes his eyes shut, pressing his face into the top of George's head.

"Yeah," he murmurs.

George hums, squeezing his hand, "She's not looking anymore. We can go now."

"She won't like it later," Dream counters.

George lifts his head, resting his chin on Dream's shoulder instead. Dream gazes back at him with glossy eyes.

"Never stopped you before," George murmurs. Dream huffs a small laugh, a faint smile touching George's lips in response. "Do you *want* to go?" he asks.

Dream nods, nose barely brushing George's. And with that, George pulls away, tightening his grip on Dream's hand as he tugs him toward the door.

They fly through a sea of suits, gowns, and perfume, George never hesitating to push past a stubborn body. Dream trails after him, led by the hand clasped to his. They soon are slipping through the front door, into the night.

The rain hammers against the roof of the porch, Dream instantly marveling at the drops they can see beyond it. The beads that stick to the bushes of the front garden, the ones that splatter ebony pavement far away. Cold licks at the skin that's exposed; the line of their necks, the apples of their cheeks, and their slender hands.

George steps forward with Dream in tow, just to the edge of the covering. He extends his hand, allowing water to spoil the perfect delicacy of it. Dream watches as George's eyes trace the cables of water, pure wonder dousing his irises.

Dream steps onto the first step, then the second. George's grip tightens and stops him in place. He glances back over his shoulder, meeting curious eyes.

"What're you doing?" George asks.

A soft grin brushes Dream's lips, "We're seeing the rain."

George blinks, eyes quickly flicking toward the street, "It's...it's heavy, our suits..."

"Come on, princess," Dream taunts, smile growing, "Don't bow out now."

George's eyes narrow, though he doesn't get the chance to form a response before Dream is tugging him down the steps. They fly through the garden while rain scathes their clothes and mats their hair, Dream giggling at George's weak attempts of protests. They pass the gates of the looming house and soon land in the center of the street, draped in starlight.

Dream cranes his neck to watch the droplets where they fall from the clouds. He spins, arms outstretched, catching them willingly. Beaming bright, he faces George again.

"You like the rain?" George half-asks, the curious hint of a smile on his lips making the cold scraping Dream's skin nearly dissipate.

"You don't?" Dream answers. His hands land naturally on George's waist, holding him close, while his smile only grows.

George looks up at the sky and the rain pummeling down on them. He seems enchanted, by the crystalline droplets and the gorgeous night sky, for a steady moment before he's meeting Dream's gaze again. The corners of his lips pull upward, invading his cheeks, and give way to a grinning row of teeth.

The air is swept from Dream's lungs at the sight. Kind euphoria lighting George's lips, displaying wild ecstasy. And the way moonlight etches his features, the slope of his nose, the cushion of his lips, his cheekbones, his jaw. The sweet glow of raindrops clinging to his eyelashes and freckling his cheeks. His hair has fallen into a mess, though it oddly suits him. And his eyes shimmer despite the dark night. It's enough to make Dream dizzy.

"I never did until now," George says, though Dream had already forgotten the question entirely.

"You're smiling," he blurts out.

George quirks a brow, a giggle falling from his lips that Dream wants to memorize. "Why wouldn't I be?"

Dream's hands move to the small of his back, eyes still latched to the smile George wears. "Why wouldn't you be," he echoes quietly.

"Your hair's a *mess*," George murmurs giddily, one hand coming to rest against Dream's neck while the other tucks a strand away. Dream's mind swarms.

"Says you," he shoots back, "You should see yourself right now, you look like a wet puppy."

George merely hums, eyes trailing over Dream's face while his smile falls quieter. Dream thinks he might like this one better, though, because it's soft and saccharine and makes him believe that George feels it too. That right now, while the world storms around them, they're both thinking of the same thing. That George, too, wants desperately to reach forward and let their lips fall together. And Dream sinks.

"I think you're even prettier in the rain," Dream admits.

George giggles, Dream's heart leaping at the sound the same way it did the first time. George watches his own finger as it traces the angle of Dream's jaw.

"I think the cold is getting to you," he answers.

Dream scoffs, grinning through a small, "Shut up."

George's eyes lift to meet his once again. His cheeks are bitten red from the cold, which only serves to paint him with childlike innocence.

"You're alright, though?" he asks.

Slowly, Dream nods, "I'm alright."

"Do you want to talk about it?" George offers shyly, face pinched.

Dream sighs, wrapping his arms completely around the boy's waist and burying his face in his neck. George's arms wind around his neck in response. His breath pours warm air over the exposed skin of Dream's neck, calming the uncertainty that slips through his veins. George provides warmth to the wintry night with just his soft smile and gentle words.

"I think I do," Dream murmurs.

"I'll listen," George answers, and it settles every hint of nerves beginning to swell in Dream's stomach.

After a moment he pulls away, instead sliding his hand into George's. "Let's walk, yeah?"

They start down the road, the moon and the stars to keep them company. Dream attempts to pinpoint a starting spot, maybe thumbtack it to the sky as a cheat sheet. But the mess in his mind seems to blur together, and so he remains quiet for a long moment. George doesn't push, only waits patiently as they follow endless pavement.

It's terrifying, to finally be letting George see a part of his life he kept stacked away in his mind for so long. Or maybe it *should* be. Dream doesn't feel the need to be afraid, though, not with George. And so he takes a steady breath, eyes toward the sky as his voice fills it with secrets.

"My real name is Clay," he says steadily, ignoring the feel of eyes digging into his skin, "Well, my birth name, I mean."

The small admission alone feels like he's already revealed so much. George says nothing, and so he continues on.

"When I was fifteen, I started going by Dream. I...I guess you could say it was the first step I made toward regaining control over my life. Something about the name Clay felt...tainted, I don't know. They had given it to me, and," he sighs, chest heavy, "While I couldn't give up everything else they had given me—this life I didn't want and a million material bribes—I could give up my name."

The rain has fallen lighter, now only slightly above a drizzle. Dream watches it for a moment, raising his free hand to twirl his fingers in the water.

"Maybe it was stupid, but it made me feel in control."

"Why did you pick Dream?" George asks carefully.

Dream laughs quietly, shrugging, "I was fifteen, of course I had to pick the tackiest thing I could think of. And then I never had the heart to change it, kinda felt like I owed it to my younger self," he answers, "It's sort of ironic, too, isn't it?"

"What?"

Dream glances down at the boy beside him, "We're not allowed to dream. Our futures have been set in stone since the day we were born."

George says nothing, the bare hint of a frown brushing his features.

"But anyway," Dream continues, looking away once more, "It only got worse from there. Well,

worse for my parents. I...I absolutely hated my life, and myself, really, so naturally I acted out. And god forbid I fall out of their control."

A drop lands on the tip of his nose and he smiles softly. "But I never really got to be a kid, y'know? My childhood was spent dressing up for fancy parties and learning how the industry works, I was miserable. So of course I wanted to make up for that. I started doing what *I* wanted."

The steady beat of his heart increases as Dream chews at his bottom lip, "And I remember so many times being called to my mother's room just for her to convince me I was wrong for that. Every time I stepped out of line, she was sending me to her room to be put back in place. I hated it because I love my mom, and disappointing her just felt...heavy. But by that point, I was so tired of having to try so hard, so I never listened. I took that weight so I could be happy."

"It was...it was a long time before it paid off. But eventually, my parents gave up trying to fix me. And I thought it ended there, I thought I could..." he swallows, blinking at the stars, "Y'know."

He smiles sadly to himself, eyes falling to watch the spot where his hand is clasped to another. He trials his thumb over George's skin to ground himself, a reminder that he's alive.

"She doesn't like when we do this," he murmurs. He tears his eyes away from the contact, "And it just...it brought back too many memories."

He sighs, following crystal constellations engraved in the wealthy sky.

"It was a reminder that I'll never escape this, I'll never be...*free* so long as I'm a royal," he shrugs wearily, "Feels like I've lost all my progress."

"That's not true," George remarks.

Dream pauses as he watches the mellow rain. "You don't think so?"

"I think," George starts, voice kind and warm, "You can't be entirely free so long as you're living with your parents. But you're getting married, Dream, and you know that I wouldn't demand those things from you. *I* know that you and I won't make the same mistakes our parents did."

Dream melts at the thought, or maybe that's the rain seeping into his skin. "We're still royals, though. And we'll still have to uphold the business end of things."

"We'll figure it out," George mends, "I'm sure of it."

Dream turns to him, eyes alight and hopeful, while their feet still on the road. The moon paints their skin in silver and glowing hues of sapphire, the quiet of the night wrapping them in comfort and closure. All the stars seem to be held in George's gaze, and Dream nearly looks up to check if they were stolen from the sky.

With the promise of a better future and a future with George, Dream feels the drizzle of rain stop, a final drop of purity landing on his cheek.

Chapter End Notes

I've had this chapter planned for so long and I love seeing it come to life ^.^

Thank you for reading!! The next chapter will be out sooner than these past few, I promise, because I'm really excited for it ;)) Leave a comment if you want and follow my twitter @yungluvXD for sneak peaks ooo

Middle of Somewhere

Chapter Summary

The second day is the day Dream's self-control escapes him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three days remain until the wedding, and Dream's just not sure how to feel.

For one, he'll be leaving his family in three days. His parents who he's loathed and loved for as long as he can remember, the ones who gave him away, are soon to be more than a few doors down. He's not sure how often he'll see them once he moves out, and he's not sure if he wants it to be a lot or a little. The only thing he's certain about is that the distance will be healthy for them.

Second, *he's getting married*. Dream is soon to be a groom, and then a husband, and all he can think is that he feels like he wasn't granted enough time. He's young and dumb and should be making reckless decisions and learning from them, but instead, he's expected to start a family of his own. And while maybe he's grateful because now he has George, and now he'll have space from his parents, and now he's been given a life of his own, he also can't help but feel terrified.

The final problem comes in the form of a brunette prince with the prettiest eyes and the sweetest lips he's ever known. Because while he may be the luckiest man in the world by getting to marry George, this also lands him in trouble. Because how the *fuck* is Dream meant to live in the same house as George, call George his husband, and spend every waking moment with George while pretending that the boy doesn't own his heart entirely. And how the fuck will Dream last.

This thought, whenever it rebounds to him, Dream always pushes away. Because there's no real answer and he would rather not dwell on that fact. And really, he would rather just not think of it at all until the moment comes where he'll have to face it head-on. Unlucky for Dream, this proves to be more difficult than he thought.

On the first of the three days, George and Dream are to visit their soon-to-be home.

It's beautiful, Dream won't lie. With gold-framed windows and opalescent glass, clean white walls, and a looming ebony door. It's fit for a king, though Dream doesn't feel he fits that title. But what makes the whole thing so difficult is that George is a *hundred* times more endearing when he's excited.

As soon as they step through the door he's dragging Dream to the first room, arm outstretched behind him because even Dream can't keep up.

The first room is a quaint living room. The green velvet sofa curls in on itself at the ends, painting it with elegance. Matching armchairs and a loveseat also sit around the room. An obnoxious chandelier lights it dimly, which Dream profusely ignores. A few bookcases line the walls, empty and lifeless.

While George plops down onto the plush sofa, Dream busies himself with scanning the room.

"Sofa's comfortable," George hums blissfully. When Dream meets his gaze, instantly melting at the kind smile touching George's lips, George pats the spot beside him.

Dream rolls his eyes as he steps toward the sofa, chest twisting at the sweetness of it all. "You know we have a ton more rooms to look at," he reprimands as he settles beside George, "You can't do this already."

George rests his head against Dream's shoulder naturally, "Why not?"

Dream's fingers can't help but find George's hair and begin to sift through the strands, "It's the first room, and we've got places to be."

"So you want to get up, then?" George challenges.

Dream sighs. "You're a prick."

"The rooms will still be there in a minute," George answers winningly.

"This isn't fair," Dream grumbles, "You're abusing your pretty privilege."

George only laughs, the melody blooming butterflies in Dream's stomach.

They find themselves next in the kitchen. It's a homely one, with mahogany cabinets and marble surfaces. The appliances are all perfectly clean and positioned, the silver so shiny it projects their reflection. An island resides in the center of the tile floor.

George traces his finger along the edge of it as he meanders slowly through the room, polished stone cutting into delicate skin. His eyes land on the set of stoves and he comes to a stop, hand falling to his side once more. Then his eyes are on Dream.

"Do you cook?"

A small grin pushes past Dream's lips, "You mean the prince doesn't want his own trained chefs?"

"We're not doing that," George answers simply.

"Doing what?"

Dream wanders toward George, leaning against the island in front of him. His hands curl around the surface.

"We won't have employees," George explains, "We'll do it right."

"You've already decided on that?" Dream inquires with raised brows. George simply shrugs, glancing back at the dark surface of the stove. His heart warms at how George seems to turn shy. "So how come?" he prods.

"It feels more human that way," George murmurs. His eyes sparkle, full of light.

Dream nods slowly, "I wouldn't say I'm a good cook, but I know a few things."

And they lighten further, lifting to find Dream again. "You can teach me. We can learn together," George offers brightly.

Dream softens at the image. Him and George, stood around the counter in feeble light, scrambling to complete a recipe. George's giggles filling the air and Dream stuffing his smile into George's

neck at the sound. Pressing him against the counter and holding his small waist in his hands. Kissing sugar from his lips, stealing his breath, unraveling him.

Dream whispers a quiet, "Yeah," and then they're moving on to the next room.

They peek their heads through many more doors, mostly parlor rooms and a couple of studies, but George quickly demands that they check out the upstairs. And with a grin so enchanting, who is Dream to disagree? So George tugs him up the stairs and Dream lets him, holding on tight.

There aren't nearly as many rooms as there are in Dream's house, but there are still many that remain vacant and useless. Those only receive a spare glance from the pair before they're moving on to the next one.

Eventually, George releases his hand as he skips ahead. Dream merely smiles at George's giddiness and urgency. The boy stares up at the ceiling and marks the walls with his gaze, so enthralled by anything and everything and so amazed that it's *theirs*.

At a new set of doors, George's grip settles on a bronze handle. He pries the door open but doesn't step inside, nor does he move on to the next. He remains still in the doorway that swallows his figure whole.

Dream comes up behind him a moment later, hands finding George's waist while he begins to observe the room.

It's bigger than the rest, holds grand windows that let sunlight pour through. In the center lies a king-sized bed, complete with thick, ivory bedding and satin pillowcases. The headboard is made of curls of champagne wood and upholstered silk. Paneled walls stretch tall, the dents and crevices gilt. A lavish chandelier decked in crystals hangs from the ceiling, taunting.

"This is our room," George murmurs.

Dream imagines it, falling asleep here every night with George beside him. Would George curl in on himself, or seek comfort in Dream's arms?

He clears his throat, still stunned at the glory of it all. "You're...you're comfortable sharing a bed?"

"We've done it before," George answers easily.

This is different, Dream declares, *This is us, alone, and this is always*.

"Are you?" George asks, his head turning slowly to the side. Dream's breath stutters as he traces George's side profile, watches the flutter of his lashes and the shallow movements of his lips intaking air.

It's different, isn't it?

"Yeah," Dream stammers, "'Course."

George's eyes reach him, wondering. They're gentle and honeyed and have total control of Dream's heartbeat. One of Dream's hands falls loose, but he curls it into a fist to stop it from slipping upward. Every inch of Dream's body wants him, *dares* him, to lean forward. Feel George's steady breath against his own. And his self-control is quickly diminishing.

"Let's go inside," Dream mumbles, almost as a plea. He hopes the desperation clinging to his voice isn't too obvious.

George turns away, Dream's hands falling from his waist when he steps into the room. Dream follows after him with hesitant eyes and labored lungs.

And what the fuck is he going to do.

The second day is the day Dream's self-control escapes him. George had come over to spend one of their final days as bachelors together, tucked away in Dream's room which is soon not to be his. He instead ends up helping Dream pack, as Dream had pushed the task off to the last minute and now his time is quickly diminishing.

Tons of boxes lay scattered around them on the floor of Dream's room, piles and piles of folded or half-folded clothes filling his bed. The two stuff the boxes full of designer turtlenecks and unworn suits.

Dream has just topped a box off, pressing it closed and setting it to the side, when a light chuckle draws his eyes to the boy across from him. George is holding a champagne jacket up to the light, one that crawls with a floral design.

"I remember this suit," he hums, smirk brushed across his lips.

"Oh my god," Dream laments, "That has to be the ugliest suit of all time."

George tsks, slipping his arms through the large sleeves. "I wouldn't say that."

When it's fully draped over his shoulders, the jacket reaches his knuckles and past his hips. "That's because you look good in everything," Dream retorts, eyes raking over George's body where he twirls in place.

George studies the pattern along the sleeve. "Do you remember this night?" he wonders. Then he's shrugging it off, revealing his pale knit sweater that softens his features impossibly further and accentuates the blush on his cheeks.

"Of course," Dream murmurs, "It was the first party we went to together."

George smiles gracefully, eyes down as he folds the jacket. "I absolutely hated you then."

A light chuckle slips from Dream's lips, "Yeah, well, I didn't exactly like you either."

"Oh, I know," George meets his gaze, "You'd made that quite apparent."

Dream shifts uneasily despite the ease that lights George's face and warms his voice. His past words have haunted him since the moment he uttered them. He tries not to think too much of the early days of their relationship.

"Remember the day before," George presses on, "At the venue."

Your fragile figure cushioned by yellow light, Dream's mind fills in. Fingertips against dangerous petals, dull eyes against porcelain skin.

"You said the marriage would be fine if it wasn't with me."

"And you said you get it," Dream breathes, almost as a question. George's smile remains though it saddens, and he glances away.

"You know I didn't like myself."

Dream aches for a martyr, a boy so hellbent on saving others that he forgot about himself. Alone and disguised as perfect, convinced that's how it was meant to be.

"And what about now?" Dream asks before he can think the words over.

George's smile fades to quiet thought. He shrugs, packing the jacket along with the memory into the box. "Now..." he sighs, voice falling lower, "Now I think I might be worth loving."

Dream watches as George lifts another stack of clothes and begins to pack those away too, eyes serene. He seems blissful, existing easily and gladly and so different from the boy Dream saw at that party. His lips always hold the echo of a smile and the cracks in porcelain skin have been gently mended.

You are, he wants to scream. *You are, you are, you are.*

"What changed?" Dream dares, voice hushed.

George's eyes lift, almost shocked as they burn into Dream's. His lips turn up once more.

"I met you," he says, as if it was entirely obvious. His voice drips of what clouds are made of.

Dream's head swims. "Me? What'd I do?"

George's lips part at that, the small huff of a laugh slipping through them. "You gave me a chance. You let me make mistakes, you stayed with me despite them, you *cared*. Even the little things, just..." he glances down at the fingers he twists together, "Just holding my hand. Everything you do, Dream, I...I honestly can't believe I deserve it."

Dream thinks his skin might be on fire, words getting stuck in his throat.

George smiles brilliantly, "And the way you think. You have a way of finding beauty everywhere you go. That's exactly what I needed, a person like you."

The world spins with George's words. If it's even possible, they make Dream love him even more.

Love.

How embarrassing.

"You do," Dream mumbles, voice raw and unfamiliar, "You—you deserve *more* than that. More than me."

George shakes his head, a frown settling on his features. "No one treats me like you do."

Fuck.

It's so blatantly obvious, isn't it? George can see right through him. How head over heels Dream is for him, how his heart is entirely and unconditionally devoted to him. Is it that obvious?

Dream's eyes fall, his heart torn between delight and grief.

"This is..." he turns away, hiding. Scary, tragic, embarrassing? Is love supposed to be like this?
"This is too much," he whispers.

"Dream?"

Dream's eyelids flutter, mind overflowing. His throat ran dry long ago but only now does he wish desperately for air. He sinks to the floor, back pressed to milk-white covers that spill over the side of the bed. It's only a moment later when George settles beside him.

They're quiet for a moment, stuck to hardwood and undoubtedly to each other, drowning in the silence.

"Did I say something wrong?" George asks.

"No," Dream mumbles, eyes trained on the glass stretched across his wall. It pours honeyed sunlight over them. Two glorified boys forced to grow up too soon.

George slips his hand into Dream's, "Tell me."

An innocent breeze ruffles the world before them, all the emerald leaves and kind flowers. It's crazy to think Dream will only own this view for so much longer.

"Aren't you the least bit afraid?"

George pauses, his breath an easy melody for Dream to latch onto. "Afraid of what, Dream?"

"The—" he bites the inside of his cheek as thoughts whirl by, "The wedding. Getting married."

"Not exactly," George murmurs, "Why are you?"

"We haven't had nearly enough time," Dream breathes.

"To prepare?"

"To live."

George falls silent. Dream turns to him, sinking deeper at the sight. Thick lashes, pretty lips, a constellation of freckles, all having become his favorite things.

"What are you afraid of?" Dream asks.

There's a moment of nothing. They wade in quiet, simply existing in the same space, the air between them taut. Then George's eyes flick down to strawberry lips and light a match that tears Dream apart.

The pull is strong, *begging* him to close the distance just for a single breath of life. Something to keep him going. And so Dream gives in.

It doesn't feel real when he fits the shape of their lips together. His eyes fall shut at the overbearing sensation. The soft press of his lips to George's, George's sweet intake of breath that Dream can feel so vividly, the syrupy slow motion of his lips before he's drawing back. It's long overdue, but it's euphoric. He thinks his heart might catch fire.

He stays close, their noses slotted together and foreheads just barely touching, gauging George's expression for a moment. Dark lashes flutter against fair cheeks before his eyes meet Dream's. They're hushed, swirling with molasses, unreadable to Dream. So near and real and washed in

loving light.

His heart drums lowly in his chest, the only sign of time passing. He stands on a steadily fraying tightrope and George decides whether he wins or falls.

A gentle tug on his hand sends him a step forward.

Dream is less hesitant this time when he crushes their lips together, free hand coming up to clutch at the fabric by George's waist and pull him closer. He sucks saccharine kisses into George's top lip and feels eyelashes brush his cheeks. George's delicate fingers are featherlight against the underside of his jaw, coaxing him in and sending starlight through his veins. He's quickly growing dizzy.

While his other hand lands on George's chest, the one stuffed into bunched fabric presses to the floor beside George. He guides George backward, the soft expanse of his palm sliding over George's collarbones and up his neck when George is lying flat beneath him. He leaves a few more mellow kisses on George's bitten lips before he's dipping away.

His hand slips down once more to fit around George's hip, a couple of fingers sneaking under the fabric of his sweater. They brush against bone and smooth, flawless skin. Lightheaded, Dream lets the tip of his nose trace the angle of George's jaw, following it from the hinge to his chin, which George lifts to allow Dream more room. His breath pours hot over George's skin, inhaling him in this state. Goosebumps alight on George's skin, wonderfully marking Dream's effect on him. Dream's lips close around a spot at the top of his neck.

When a knock sounds at the door, he nearly ignores it. Because this is really just not fair, and he's greedy and selfish and hopelessly *in love*. But his head lifts anyway, eyes darting toward the direction of the sound.

He's incredibly glad he'll be moving out soon.

Dream glances down at the boy pressed beneath him, glossy lips, blown pupils, ruffled hair, and all. George merely blinks, chest rising and falling with labored breaths. And he just looks so much *prettier* like this, when he's kissed breathless and when he's Dream's.

Dream presses his forehead to George's chest, releasing all of his devastation in a sigh. Then he's unwillingly pulling away and drawing himself from the floor. George follows silently, combing a hand through his hair and staring at the hardwood when he's standing once again.

"Come in," Dream calls, not even attempting to hide the annoyance that seeps into his voice.

The door drifts open, unsurprisingly presenting Cecille. Her gaze barely reaches Dream, though, instead landing on George.

"Your father requested you home," she relays, eyes kind.

Dream glances at George where the boy stares back at Cecille. His face lays blank as do his lips.

George simply nods, his eyes never meeting Dream's once as he heads for the door and slips wordlessly away.

Dream's not sure what he expected. But it certainly wasn't to be avoided.

On the third day, Dream is meant to attend a party in celebration of the day to follow. A celebration of his marriage with George and George's marriage with him and the nerves are racked high because he just fucking kissed George and hasn't spoken to him since. He's maddened with questions of will he be sent off the edge and will George simply watch, tethered to insanity.

Dream's mind is full of George. Like how when he dresses, clad in a deep, shimmering indigo suit that was assigned to him, he wonders if George's suit will match. And when he flares his collar, exposing the strong line of his neck, he wonders if George's touch there would make his head spin. And when he slips the thick silver of his rings onto his fingers, he wonders how they would look against George's milky skin as he pins him down.

Dream leaves the house in a flurry of wishes and pleas, all carved into his skull and all having to do with George.

So when he arrives at the venue, he immediately begins scouring the floor for the boy. The place is definitely overflowing, which Dream can't help but find humor in because he recognizes quite literally none of these people and they're all here celebrating him. The space is dim, decorated with intense care. Small tables are scattered around and dressed in satin. Roses are trapped in glass, strung into garlands, and plucked of their petals and strewn artfully across the floor. A long line of tables holds plentiful piles of charming delicacies. And in the center of it all, a champagne fountain.

The faces all mass together, each and every one put through the same routine. Smothered in jewels, doused in perfume, washed in plastic joy. But Dream scours nonetheless, pushing past strangers in search of a single set of eyes.

When he does find George, the boy isn't alone. He's stood beside an unfamiliar gentleman, chatting kindly. And even from a distance, he's so breathtakingly beautiful. Ivory and placid skin, hair swept in careless waves and falling into his eyelashes. He smiles politely with pretty pink lips, and the light brushes glitter across his cheekbones and the tip of his nose. He wears a jet-black suit, the tie wrapped tightly around his neck matching the material of Dream's suit.

The first red flag is the drink clutched by his side.

Villanous glimmering nectar and half the glass already drained. Slender fingers strangle it, swirling the liquid where it sits trapped. When Dream's eyes lift from the toxin there's a pair staring back at him. George's eyes are round and wary, though he quickly looks away, placing a kind hand on the man's shoulder and muttering something short. Then he's wandering away and not looking back.

Dream feels the first pang of dejection then.

Maybe he hoped George would bound up to him in rejoice, the grin that stops Dream's heart perfectly in place. Maybe he hoped George would lace their fingers together, drag him toward the edge of the crowd where he could have him just for himself. He hoped for *something*, even if it was just a simple greeting. But for whatever reason, George was pulling away again. It was probably Dream's fault for hoping.

Embarrassing, is Dream's loudest thought. It rings through his skull and scratches his veins. Who was he to want more? Who was he to assume George wanted the same thing?

Dream's chest swells with something blue and he has to force himself to turn away, to tear his eyes from the spot where George stood.

He's just fucked it all up, hasn't he?

The night is painfully long. And that's only because Dream has lost the only person he wanted to spend it with.

He watches from afar as George converses with guest after guest. As George swallows sip after sip of gold champagne. It's unfair, really, that Dream's own guests are the ones who get to fall under the mercy of George's smile. And that lifeless crystal glasses are the ones who get to feel George's lips.

Pathetic, is how Dream feels. Because even distant, George's laugh and George's grin and George's general presence make him dizzy. It all tears him apart. The boy is fucking *mesmerizing*, beautiful in every sense of the word, and just beyond the realm of enchanting. He feels fictional. Unreachable. A prince only scribbled into the pages of a storybook. Untouchable. Dream sees him in shades of jade and turquoise and sapphire, a sparkling disarray of everything good and a walking reminder of the desperate love that has him falling apart.

And every time George places a kind touch on the appointed guest of his attention, Dream can't help but reel. Dark eyes set on the gesture and heart sinking further. And he, too, throws glass after glass of champagne down his throat to numb the pain.

He's sure people notice how the groom and groom seem the exact opposite of lovey-dovey. How one writhes under the amber light, quiet and pushed to the side. Walking along the edge of tragedy. And how the other pursues distraction after distraction, avoids the roaring mess clearly set before them. But Dream can't bring himself to care, nor to clean up.

And though George avoids every imperfection that's embedded into the night, one can only run for so long.

It's when Dream is at the end of his rope. Tucked within shadows, Dream's withered eyes watch as George, for once, stands alone in the hearth. His figure is swallowed whole by the surrounding crowd. George stares at the glass cupped in his hands, breaths steadily rocking his chest.

He glances up and surveys the crowd with worn eyes, looking entirely *lost*. His smile is long gone and replaced by something more authentic; the barest hint of a frown. When his gaze settles on Dream, bites into his skin with gentle sadness, he doesn't immediately look away. Dream's fingertips itch to reach out and soothe the exhaustion etched in the boy's features. George regards him for a moment, eyes tracing Dream's body, before he sets his glass down on the table before him and turns away.

Without thinking Dream steps forward, feet numb as they carry him toward George. George, who pushes through the mob hurriedly. But Dream only walks faster, his body soon melting into the crowd. He shoves through it too, eyes locked on George.

When George finds the place where the crowd ends, he disappears into a hallway, Dream disappearing too not a moment later.

His heart races, mind muddled. And his hand shakes as it reaches out and catches George's shoulder, tugging him backward as Dream comes to stand in front of him. And instantly he melts,

because the boy is *impossibly* prettier up close.

Dream's chest rises and falls with uneven breaths, his throat tightening. George doesn't look at him, his eyes sad and tired and on the floor.

"George," Dream exhales.

George glances up but his eyes *still* don't reach Dream, instead landing past Dream's shoulder. He takes a step forward, "I have to go check on the kitchen."

Dream's hand shoots out, palm pressing to the wall and his arm blocking George's path. George steps backward again. He meets Dream's gaze, eyes full of shame and pity and Dream's skin burns.

"What happened?" Dream asks, desperation escaping into his voice in the process. He searches George's face and comes up blank.

"I don't know what you mean," George answers lowly.

Dream shakes his head, intentionally not leaving George any wiggle room when he declares, "I kissed you."

George swallows thickly, glancing to the right. When his eyes find Dream's again they're pleading.

"Dream," he whispers, his voice velvet and so familiar it leaves Dream's skin crawling, "Don't do this."

And just like that, every thread carefully woven by George himself unravels, undoing Dream entirely. His eyes turn to devastation while his hand slips from the wall, suddenly too weak. And George just watches.

Then why did you pull me in, Dream's mind screams.

Why were my lips met with pliancy?

Why did you say those things?

Why did you make me believe that you felt it too?

Why did you say that I made you think you were worth loving, when you don't even love me back?

Why do you hold my hand?

Why do you tear me apart.

Why don't you think twice about it.

Dream's veins suddenly fill with flames, his mind choosing to blame George. George tricked him, George used him. His irises ignite behind shattered glass.

When Dream steps forward, chest connecting with George's shoulder and breath pouring hot over George's skin, he fills his words with bitterness. He was always a sore loser.

"Got it," Dream bites, and then he's gone.

Dream finds himself, broken and lonely, on the steps of the venue's front garden. Embers and ashes sit low in his stomach and smoke licks his veins. In the absence of alcohol and the overwhelming voice of a crowd, Dream's only company is the moon and the stars. They treat him kindly, soothe some of the burns on his skin and stitch a bit of his heart. The cool night gives him air, as much as his throat can swallow.

And Dream can't help but revel in the irony of it all. Rejected by George today and marrying him tomorrow. And he has no fucking clue what he's going to do.

But Dream just lets starlight paint his skin silver, and lets melancholy sting his chest, and he's alone until he hears the door swing open behind him. Footsteps mock him and soon George is sat on the steps beside him, but Dream just stares at the sky.

George stays quiet for long, Dream nearly believing he imagined it and that George never really sat down beside him. But there's the steady breath that marks his presence and drives Dream's mind wild. Dream wonders how something once so sweet could now be so sour. And he wonders if he'll ever feel that way about George's other details.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," George whispers.

Dream's jaw tightens. "I kissed you. You kissed me back. You completely avoided me for a whole night, and then couldn't even give me a straight answer. Couldn't just *say* that you don't feel the same way. What did you *think* would happen?"

"I didn't *want* to hurt you—"

"Then why didn't you stop me," Dream breathes, looking to George.

George's features are wild and sad, yet still hopelessly beautiful. He squeezes his eyes shut and presses his forehead into Dream's shoulder, Dream's heart aching at the gesture. George reaches for the hand that lays in Dream's lap, pulling it into his own and holding it gently with two hands.

"I didn't want to," he admits quietly. And then, even lower, "I'm scared, Dream."

Dream stutters on a breath, the skin of his palm writhing. "W—what?"

"I don't know what I'm doing," George pleads, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you."

Dream's heart breaks a second time, this time for George. He lifts his empty hand to hold George's jaw and guide his face upward. And Dream was wrong, George's eyes are *afraid*.

"I don't understand," Dream murmurs, tucking a strand of hair behind George's ear.

George leans into the touch and Dream's head spins further. "I don't want you to be angry with me," George whispers, "I don't want you to look at me that way again. I feel *horrible*—"

"What way?"

George's face softens, carefully studying Dream's features. "In the hallway," he mumbles.

Dream bites the corner of his lip, suddenly tearing his hand away from George's jaw. "Right." Suddenly all too aware of how nothing will dull the way he feels for George, even George's rejection itself.

"No," George rushes, "No, Dream, I..." He shakes his head, eyes skittering away, "I'm really bad at

this. I don't know how to talk to you..."

"George," Dream soothes, "It's *me*."

"It's you," George echoes, "Exactly. You...you're good at this. You find feelings easy. I don't know how to do this."

"Just talk to me," Dream pleads, "I—I can't figure out what you're thinking."

George shakes his head once more, eyes now eager and set on Dream. "No, Dream, you're not hearing me," he declares, "I don't know how to do this. That's why I...that's why I avoided it. God, it's *you*, Dream, of course..."

Dream frowns, mind fuzzy and too *full*. "I don't get it."

Silence blankets them for a moment, their eyes falling quiet and gentle. Dream waits and waits, so wrapped up in a million racing thoughts and not sure which one to believe.

"I've never liked anyone before," George whispers, "But I—I can't stop thinking about you. Even when we're not together. And—and you have a way of making me lightheaded, like...when you say my name. And when you hold my hand or...or my waist, it's..." he swallows, eyes falling, "And I think that's right. I think that's what it's supposed to feel like."

Dream can barely process it all, so lost in every word.

"There's no *right*, George," he mumbles, earning George's gaze again. George pauses, eyes growing more comfortable and familiar with each passing second.

"When you kissed me it was scary. It felt like...like I was promising you something I wasn't sure I could give. And it felt *huge* and...and too honest," he explains, "But at the same time, it felt safe. I didn't know what I was doing, but I knew I could trust you."

"Of course you can trust me."

"And I do."

"Then what's the problem?" Dream begs.

George inhales, eyes wandering to Dream's lips. "When we're friends it's easy. Being more is..." he sighs, finding Dream's gaze again, "It's a big commitment. And if something went wrong..."

Dream frowns, shaking his head, "What are you talking about?"

George's features fall soft, his voice even softer, "I'm just afraid of losing you."

Dream's heart sinks, one more thing falling into place. "You won't," he insists, clutching tighter at George's hand, "You know you won't."

Uncertainty still remains in George's bearing, etched in his skin and his silence.

Willing to put himself on the line, Dream whispers, "I love you."

George's eyes lighten ever so slightly, searching Dream's face and the promise there. But his tense state doesn't ease.

"My parents were in love once," he says lowly.

And there it is. The reason George won't let go, the thing holding him back.

"How do I know the same thing won't happen to us?" he asks.

Dream shakes his head, eyes desperate. "George, this is *us*. You have to trust that we won't let that happen," Dream soothes, "You told me that you're sure we'll work it out. And whatever happens, *I'm* sure that we will too. We won't make the same mistakes as our parents, remember?"

George's eyes drop to their hands, still unsure.

"You said you think you might be worth loving," Dream murmurs, "And you *are*, George. Now let yourself be loved."

When George doesn't answer Dream's hand finds his face again, lifting it once more. The night is quiet, the serenity of it held in George's features. Always so graceful and always holding so many secrets, but now they feel alleviated, nearly mended.

"It's okay," Dream says, "You can trust me. I won't let you get hurt."

George presses his forehead to Dream's, sighing as he traces the constellations on Dream's cheeks.

"Yeah," he murmurs, "Okay."

The simple words quiet every aching worry in Dream. He can hardly believe he heard them, the fragile breath dancing over his skin making his mind fuzzy. He watches George's lips, the fucking eighth wonders that they are, silver licked rose petals and honey-sweet.

And as if stealing candy from a child, George pulls away, a brilliant grin lighting his lips as he looks toward the stars. Like he *knows* he's robbed Dream of the thing that's kept him up at night for weeks on end. Like he knows he has that effect on Dream.

Moonlight pours over every angle of his face and Dream knows he'll never get tired of the sight.

"You know I'm getting married tomorrow," George hums.

Dream can't help the smile that tugs at his own lips. "God, shut up," he answers, voice probably *far* too gooey. He settles his head against George's shoulder, fiddling with the hand in his.

"What do you think about that?"

"I think there's a party celebrating the fact, yet we're not even at it," Dream scolds weakly. George hums, the soft sound lulling Dream's eyes shut. "What do you think?" he mumbles.

"I think my fiancé is about to pass out," George says.

"Yeah, got tired from chasing after his prince all evening," Dream drawls.

George pauses, watching the moon as though it were a piece of art. "I hope it was worth it."

"It was."

"You're too kind to me."

"Not at all."

George traces his thumb over Dream's knuckles. "I'm sorry I'm so difficult."

Dream frowns, placing a kiss on the curve of George's neck. "You're not difficult," he murmurs, "You're learning."

George says nothing, his gaze unattaching from the sky to watch his fingers lace with Dream's.

"You know I'm getting married tomorrow," Dream sings.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," Dream hums, "My fiancé's pretty amazing."

George huffs a small laugh, but it's saddened. Dream catches a glimpse of his eyes, drenched in moonlight and dipped in something blue.

"What's wrong?" he asks, lifting his head to place another kiss on George's cheekbone.

George faces him and his eyes glitter, still bittersweet but now full of warmth. "Nothing," he mumbles, watching with gentle wonder at how Dream's skin matches the night sky, freckled and glowing, "Isn't that odd?"

Dream can't even think before he's pressing forward, their lips folding together as though it makes perfect sense. As if their lips were only made to fit each other. And Dream's perfectly okay with that. It's wild how the sweet crush of their lips can make Dream's heart soar so easily. George sighs into it, eyes fluttering shut with ease and trust.

And if Dream goes home that night more in love than when the day started, nobody has to know.

Chapter End Notes

SECOND TO LAST CHAPTER :((

Story's coming to an end awww. I also want to make it clear that I am not writing the whole wedding oops sorry but that sounds kind of boring in my opinion. But thank you for 5k hits <33 that is a crazy lot. Leave a comment or kudos if u want, you're lovely xoxoxo!!

King's King

Chapter Summary

This is our happily ever after.

Chapter Notes

Oh shit.

Where do I start lol :.)

Doing all of my notes at the beginning so this is the final note of the story. Aww.

Thank you all so much for reading I actually can't believe this many people care about my writing but the support has been really nice :) I've had so much fun creating these characters and this wacky world, so thank you for sticking through it with me. Final thank you, thank you for all of your lovely comments, they have given me a lot of the motivation it took to finish this story. & if there's one last favor you could do for me, listen to Bravado by Lorde throughout this chapter, especially the final scene. I hope you enjoy the last chapter, you're all v lovely <333 :D

Also you can follow me on Twitter because I am going to be writing more fics:
@yungluvxXD

THIS IS KINDA SAD LOL I FEEL LIKE IM LOSING MY CHILD

Dream had long been anticipating the moment he would get to sink into his sheets, unpack his mind, and drift to sleep. It had been a long day, to say the least, and tomorrow was sure to be an even longer one. Hectic with the desire for perfection. And Dream was sure going to need a lot of energy for *that* circus. However, what he didn't anticipate was a perfect white pebble cutting through the night sky and clashing with his window.

Dream, fingertip on his comforter, turns to the spot where the thud sounded from. And just as he does, another one comes flying, connecting with opal glass before it's inevitably tugged to the ground again. He meanders cautiously toward the window and peers down at the dark garden. Shadows webbed in bushes, moonlight curled into petals, and in the middle of it all, a spellbinding boy with young eyes and a third pebble pinched between his fingers.

With an easy throw, he sends it toward the window, Dream flinching when it lands just to the right of his face. He presses his palms to the glass and squints down at George once more. Through the dark and the distance, he barely catches the motion when George waves a beckoning hand at him. And without a second thought, Dream starts toward the hall.

He's quickly rushing down the stairs, nearly tripping over his own feet multiple times in the process. He feels (and most definitely *looks*) like a kid, hurdling through the house on a holiday or rushing to meet his friends. It only adds to the delight steadily growing louder in his chest. When his hand meets cool brass and throws the door open, he can't help the grin that breaks out onto his

face.

George stands at the bottom of the steps, his own devilish smile on display. His figure is softened by baggy clothes and cushioned by the night sky. Dark hair falls in innocent waves over his face and flawless skin is only blemished by freckles and thick lashes, his candied lips far too appealing.

Dream shuts the door behind him dazedly, unable to tear his eyes from the boy. He starts down the steps, hands instantly curling around a gentle waist.

"Aren't you quite the cliché," he muses, arching a brow. He leaves a kiss on the tip of George's nose, "What are you doing here?"

George shrugs, eyes blissful and shimmering. "I couldn't sleep."

With taunting wide eyes, Dream asks, "You snuck out?"

George merely rolls his own, "Hardly."

"Hm, sorry, I don't harbor fugitives," Dream hums, "Better luck next time."

George glares, nevertheless lifting one hand to wrap around Dream's neck, the other beginning to sift through blond strands.

"Look who's suddenly a rule follower," he mocks.

A chuckle falls from Dream's lips, George's eyes brightening at the sound. "I'm turning over a new leaf," Dream says.

"I'm so sure."

"You're not making a very good case for yourself," Dream critiques, "For someone who wants to stay at my house. And isn't there a rule, like, you're not allowed to see your fiancé the night before the wedding?"

"Huh. Guess I'll go home, then," George threatens, eyes sparkling. His hands fall away and he takes a shallow step backward, but Dream's hands only tighten around him. He glares, George's mischievous look never faltering.

"You suck."

"You going to let me in?"

"I'm going to make you sleep in the bushes."

George's eyes narrow, a daring smile peeking through. He hops up onto his toes and wraps his arms around Dream's neck, narrowing the gap between them. Dream's breath stutters, stolen not a moment later when George sucks a small, sugary kiss to his lips.

"Please?" George coaxes sweetly. It's the first time George initiated a kiss, and while maybe that shouldn't mean anything Dream can't help but feel like it means a lot. Like for the first time, he can fully believe he has George in the same way George has him. Dream hopes his heartbeat isn't as loud as it is in his own skull.

He admires the hopeful look George wears, helplessly nearing the title of an incurable devotee, "Okay, Tippy-Toes."

George's sappy smirk is wiped off his face immediately, replaced with another glare. He tears his arms away, landing back on his heels, and Dream's grin only widens.

George folds his arms over his chest, the glower bordering on a pout, "Fine. I'll just go home."

"No, no, no," Dream rushes, risky chuckles falling with the words.

George arches a brow, "Take it back, then."

Dream attempts to muffle his grin but decides that's hopeless and opts for burying it in George's neck. "Don't get all businessman on me."

"Dream."

"I take it back, I take it back," he giggles

"So are you going to let me in, or what?" George inquires.

Dream lifts his head, pressing a kiss to George's cheekbone and the patch of freckles there and stealing one from his lips. "Yeah, yeah, whatever you say, princess."

Without another word, he engulfs George's hand in his and begins tugging him toward the door, careful to open it quietly enough. They roam through the house toward the security of familiar walls. The house is dim, only lit by the milky light that spills in through crystal windows. It leaves silver on the tile floors, broken by shadows and the soles of their feet.

As soon as a second set of doors is shut behind them, Dream is whirling around to meet his favorite face again. George is almost instantly pressed to the wood, eyes fluttering at the sudden gesture. Dream's gentle—albeit *large*—hands ghost up his sides and capture his jaw, tilting his head up at just the right angle for Dream's lips to bite into his.

George clutches at the fabric covering his chest and by his waist, melting into Dream's touch. The delicate, lazy motion of George's cherry lips makes Dream's insides swirl. His thumb scrapes the angle of George's cheekbone as he sinks deeper into George's pliant mouth and his heart plunges into giddy warmth.

When George grins, breathes giggles into their kiss, Dream falters. He meets George's eyes, his own filled with tangible admiration. He feels winded at the sound each time, the curls of laughter so sweet and naive. George stares back, a secret tucked within his gaze.

"What's so funny?" Dream murmurs.

George draws his lip between his teeth as he shakes his head, "Nothing's funny."

Dream's eyes narrow, his hands wandering downward to cradle George's waist. One hand slips under the thin cotton of George's shirt to hold the small of his back, George visibly dwindled by the contact.

"You're giggling," Dream counters.

"I'm not giggling."

Dream traces a fingertip over the bottom of George's spine, eyes narrowing further. "Tell me."

George says nothing, instead lets his eyes wilt shut as he pushes their lips together once more. This one is velvet, red and lush and alluring. It makes Dream's mind fuzzy.

"You can't do that," he mumbles, nevertheless sucking brazenly on George's bottom lip, "'S cheating."

George merely hums, his fingertips igniting every inch of skin they touch when they trail up the side of Dream's neck. But then Dream's warmth is stolen and his arms are empty, and he's spinning dizzily around to watch George drift toward his bed.

"Weren't you the one who was all sleepy earlier?" the boy wonders, "And now you're all *kissy* when we should be sleeping."

Dream rolls his eyes, smiling softly as George crawls onto the mattress. He crosses his arms over his chest in protest. "You're going to tell me."

George only beams, eyes sparkling brilliantly. Legs tucked under the covers, he pats the spot beside him.

Dream attempts to hold his ground, he really does. But the look on George's face—gaze painted in magenta and iridescence, lips kissed scarlet, and skin dusted by light drowsiness, Dream could write a *book* about it—nearly makes his knees buckle. And Dream is dragged toward the bed by his own hopeless heart.

He's swept under the fluffy covers and when his head hits the pillow, George is already there waiting for him. Looking *impossibly* prettier and Dream's not sure how to cope.

He allows kind fingers to brush at the hair by George's forehead, his other arm wrapping around George's soft figure. "Are you actually gonna sleep, or was that just an excuse?"

George tucks his head into Dream's chest, easy breaths seeping through the fabric of Dream's shirt. "Mhm," he doesn't exactly answer.

Dream huffs a small laugh, now soothing the strands at the back of George's head. "Are you ever gonna tell me your little secrets, Mystery Boy?"

Though George doesn't answer, Dream feels low chuckles against his chest. And that's enough for him, sleep beginning to tug at his own eyelids.

"Goodnight," he whispers as though it means everything, "I love you."

The morning is vibrant. Dream can't believe he'll soon be able to spend every morning like this.

The first bit of wake is pried from him when he feels white fingertips caressing patterns on his arm. His mind is blurred with peachy clouds and the faint reminder of a dream. He burrows his face deeper into the plush pillow, and at that, a wanderlust thumb traces his cheekbone and descends down the side of his face. It stirs him just barely, stuck between slumber and awareness until benevolent words catch his ear.

"Dream," George murmurs, voice a dozed timbre, "We have to get up."

When Dream recognizes the voice, remembers that he had fallen asleep wrapped around George—

and his *mind* certainly wrapped around George, too—Dream shuffles closer. His eyes remain stubbornly closed, though he buries his face deeper in George's tumbled hair.

"Come on," George prods. He presses a kiss to the front of Dream's throat, "Lots of things to do."

Dream merely hums, all too disoriented from sleep and the prospect of George in bed beside him. And there's a sunny thought, *George*, in *bed*, rumpled by blissful sheets and ivory dreams, next to *Dream*, in fact, stashed within his arms. Dream slips the hand that lays limp behind George's head down to curl around his waist, sneaking under the hem of a burdening shirt because it's really just his favorite thing to do and George's breath hitches every time.

"Let's stay in," Dream mumbles incoherently, the warm skin nearly lulling him back to sleep. He revels blissfully in the way his thumb fits perfectly into the dip of George's waist.

"We can't miss our own wedding," George protests.

And *that* sparks a light in Dream's mind. "Wedding?"

George chuckles, the sound going straight to Dream's heart. "Wedding. Many preparations, so little time."

Dream thinks it over. However, curled around George and drowning in blankets sufficiently beats getting stuck in a suit and fake-smiling at rows of dolls.

"No," Dream declines, "It's okay."

"You don't want to get married to me?"

"I don't want to move from this spot."

George sighs, the tip of his nose brushing the line of Dream's neck when he moves to press his forehead to Dream's chest. And although it wasn't his intent, it still makes Dream's skin tingle. They fall silent and fall pliant to the mound of blankets. Dream's fingers alight chills on George's skin as they graze the small of his back. And Dream smiles quietly to himself, believing he'd won when suddenly he's on his back and George is straddling his hips.

His breath catches in his throat, in part from surprise at the sudden movement but mostly because it's the first time he's seeing George this morning and *fuck* is the boy a sight to see. Fluffed from sleep and lit by pure serenity, his glazed spring eyes fucking *euphoric*. And—fuck—Dream's heart nearly flatlines. Pressed to the sheets, dizzied for a list of reasons, George *sat on top of him*.

George arches a brow, his expression thoroughly unimpressed. "Get up."

A grin breaks out on Dream's lips as his hands find George's thighs. It's a shame the milky skin is concealed. "Now *why* would I do that?"

George rolls his eyes, ready to swing his leg back over in protest or maybe disgust, but Dream's hands keep him firmly in place. George glares though he receives not nearly the same look in return.

"I, personally, don't want to be late for my own wedding."

"Late is on time," Dream offers, leaning up to steal a kiss. He doesn't make it, however, George pushing him back into the mattress.

"You're not allowed," he says flatly.

"What the hell," Dream complains, "I'm your fiancé, asshole."

"Exactly," George declares, "You can't be my fiancé forever."

Dream tsks, "Marriage is overrated."

George pauses, eyes narrowing. He sits in quiet concentration for a lingering moment. Dream simply gazes back in dopey adoration, studying the polished umber of his irises under young sunlight, thick inky lashes blinking languidly. And then George's eyes light with an idea.

"How about this," George says finally, "When we're married, and living together, we can sleep in for as long as you want. You get this every day, if you just get up right now, okay?"

Dream imagines it, nearly forgets to breathe in the process. The two of them, tangled in bedsheets and softened by sleep, morning voices and love-drunken kisses and gentle fingertips kindling fair skin. All of it wrapped in dawn, all of it with George, and all of it every day.

He beams, the sun rays that slip in through the window igniting the angles of his face. His hands slide up George's hips and around his waist before they fist the fabric of his shirt, tugging him forward.

"Fine," he surrenders lowly, eyes blazed as they drip down to George's mouth, awaiting a—in his opinion—*well-deserved* kiss.

But George simply rolls his eyes, pulls away, and stands from the bed. "You're obscene," he mutters.

"You're a tease," Dream retorts, watching George's backside disappear into the bathroom.

While George will inevitably be torn away from Dream when they're to be dressed up and painted for the prospect of a royal wedding, lucky for Dream there's still one last inexcusably posh function for them to attend. A cutesy and humble breakfast banquet for the two. It's said to be small, but what the hell does that mean in a world where "over the top" is hardly a phrase at all.

The location is properly done up, with dove table linens and blush accent pieces, a vase of frail pink flowers in the center of every table. With an arm wrapped around a small waist—it's practically become a reflex at this point—Dream steps wordlessly past the rows of steadily filling tables. When they pass one with entirely empty seats, Dream reaches over to pluck a flower by its stem from the glass, feet never faltering. He offers it toward the boy pressed to his side with a sweet grin.

George's eyes catch on the petals before they shift upward, narrowed slightly. The corners of his rosy lips twist vaguely into a smile. He doesn't take the offer, though his eyes are colored with amusement where they're locked with Dream's.

"Those are decoration," he reprimands.

Dream's smile can't help but grow. He tucks the flower behind the boy's ear at his hesitancy, "Looks better on you."

George shakes his head softly, a tint of pink blooming on his cheeks. He looks particularly

stunning, Dream thinks, in the clean and bright lighting of the room. His delicate collarbones are exposed where the sheer white fabric of his shirt falls open, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His hair curls around his ears and at the base of his neck, framing gentle features.

Dream places a kiss on the side of his head dutifully, lingering by his ear for a moment as he pulls away to whisper, "Happy wedding day."

They settle at an especially garish table, folding pale napkins over their laps as soon as they're seated. The porcelain teacups laid before them are instantly filled with steaming tea, Dream glaring at the substance. An airy laugh sounds from his left, and he glances over to find George already lifting the pitcher of cream.

"You're a child," George murmurs, pouring a splash of it into Dream's cup.

"What're you doing?" Dream answers with a scowl, watching the dark liquor swirl with white ivy. George adds a bit of sugar to the mixture, paying no mind to Dream's tone.

"I'm showing you how to make good tea," he dips a silver teaspoon in and swirls it gracefully before he sits back in his chair once more, "Try it."

Hesitantly, Dream lifts his glass and presses it to his lips. The tea is certainly better than whatever Dream makes, and at least tolerable, but as Dream sets the cup down he mutters, "I don't think I'm a tea person."

George grins, taking a sip of his own to muffle the gesture.

When their breakfast is presented to them on china dishes, it's a display of fruit and cream and pastries, not a crumb out of place. Dream indulges in the perfect meal, but not quietly of course. He's only swallowed his first bite when a thought pesters him.

"George."

George eyes him, brows raised, "Dream."

"You know, this is our last meal as bachelors," Dream announces.

"It is," George agrees, shoveling a bite into his mouth.

"How do you feel about that?"

A small smile tints George's lips as he chews, watching Dream fondly. "I feel alright," he answers once his bite is swallowed.

"Our next meal is going to be at the wedding," Dream trails on, "And then, guess what?"

"What, Dream?"

"The *next* one will be at our house. Probably."

George nods, filling his fork with another portion, "That's true."

"Are you excited to live with me?" Dream wonders, "I'm excited. I'd like to have you around all the time."

George glances down at his plate, his lips pulling inward in an attempt to smother a grin. His eyes glow when they meet Dream's again, radiating with youthful ecstasy. He motions to the dishes

before Dream, "Are you going to eat?"

Dream hesitates before looking to his own plate. He frowns slightly, lifting his fork and beginning to fill it. He can't help but feel a tinge of disappointment as he chews, until George speaks again.

"Of course I'm excited to live with you," he says kindly, voice clean and even, "You know that."

Dream ticks his head in George's direction, "I like to hear you say it."

The corners of George's lips invade his cheeks, dimples carved into them. Dream watches the sensation intently. "I'm excited for a lot of things with you," George admits.

Dream's heart sinks, wonder lighting his face. "Really?" he asks breathlessly.

When George looks to him again his amber eyes burn into Dream's skin, wickedly loving. A tentative frown brushes his lips, "Well, yes."

Dream mindlessly leans closer, his elbows perching on the back of his chair and the surface of the table. Childlike fascination rushes through his veins. "Like what?"

George's gaze slips toward Dream's lips, his own features falling quiet along with his voice, "I don't know."

"You do," Dream presses, "It's okay, George, you can say."

"Well, the little things," George answers, finding Dream's eyes timidly, "Having dinner together, rainy days, shopping trips. Don't you think about that?"

"Shopping?" Dream inquires, George's shyness adding to his smile.

George nods, "We could visit the city. You said you liked it there."

Dream softens because *George remembers*. His eyes dance across George's flushed cheeks adoringly, "And the big things?" he dares.

George's skin grows redder. He faces the table again, gaze scattered. "I—I don't know."

"Do you think about our future, George?"

The boy says nothing, eyes falling to his lap. He's shrunk by the question, though Dream's delayed to realize why. He feels a bit of guilt wash through him and he's quick to attempt to mend his mistake. His fingers find George's chin, gently turning him toward Dream again. George stares silently.

"It's alright," Dream says, chest tight, "You know you'll have me forever."

George's lips part, though it's a moment later that words fall through. "It scares me," he answers, "When I think about it. But I know that when we get there it won't be."

Dream's smile returns, eyes soft and sweet. "That's okay."

George purses his lips, quiet and thoughtful for a moment. "Do you think about it?"

Dream swallows a wider grin, turning toward the table as his arm stretches across the back of George's chair. "What do you think?"

"I don't know," George answers simply.

Dream surveys the happy faces and full tables around them, the room all decorated in pink and white in celebration of love and purity. It should be a given, really, considering they're already getting married. Dream can't believe George is still that unsure of himself.

He glances at George again and the boy is already staring back at him, waiting. Young and innocent in some ways, though he holds the weight of life in others. And so breathtakingly beautiful Dream falls harder by the hour.

"I'm in love with you, George. You're all I think about."

A clue of surprise catches on his features. Dream thinks he'll make it a point to tell him how lovely he is every day.

"Even the future?" George treads carefully.

"Even the future."

George's eyes fall to Dream's collar, and Dream watches as he clings to thoughts and words, dreams and ideas, wondering where it'll land them one day. Dream's patient, and finds he could never get tired of existing with George. Even the lines of his face are captivating.

George's gaze drifts upward once more. He sends Dream a small smile, though it seems to mean everything, and nods before he's finding his plate again.

It's a wonder, Dream thinks, that in a room of so many people, he only sees the one. But he's the fucking idiot that fell in love, he supposes.

Dream's husband is a wonder in himself. He's quite reserved, though at times that'll unravel and when it does he's rather charming. He speaks as though he mends scars, voice pure clemency and grace. Dream likes to spend time with him best in secrecy because when he's with the right person George can be vulnerable. And when Dream holds his waist, tells him how beautiful he is, or litters innocent kisses across his skin, he can tell that George stores the memories in a safe place in his mind, and so Dream never stops. And Dream could talk about him for hours.

So it's not exactly his fault that the lively chatter that spills into the air is merely dull noise at the back of his skull. And that the others surrounding them, possibly more than a dozen faces, feel beyond compare to the one beside him. Dream watches as George indulges the strangers, gorgeous satin lips and marbled irises. And he can't believe *this* is the boy that met him at the end of the aisle only a moment ago.

He'd looked gorgeous, George always does, but even more so when he was a stretch away from being wed to Dream. A classic ebon tux juxtaposed oil-painted skin and his shining irises held Dream's gaze with light curiosity. Because Dream *stared*, far past speechless and his pupils swollen with awe. And he married George, under a sunbleached altar and many prying eyes, ones he couldn't possibly care to mind. And it nearly felt like a dream, but then he'll glance at George's hand and the thick jewel wrapped around his slender finger and he's breathless once again.

Fallen under the mercy of orthodox traditions, the two then had their first dance, the one they had been so ridiculously trained for. Dream's hands molded like a habit around George's waist and clutched at him with utmost care. The small hands that landed around Dream's neck soothed any tension wound around his spine. When they danced, he marveled at George as if he was an artwork.

The celebration has fully burst now, exclamations of delight filling the room all the way up to its high ceilings. The sun has set, violet night falling through the line of windows and combatted by golden lighting. Alcohol is passed around and happily snuck through lips. Dream holds a glass of his own, though he barely pays mind to it. He only takes sips to fill the gap in his side of the conversation because while George entertains the guests' bland choice of topic, Dream really has no idea what they're talking about.

Dream lifts his glass up to his lips as he hears something about frogs or some exotic sport, the words all distorted. He tips it back slowly, brows lowered at the couple who hog the conversation.

"Yes, we really do," George says with a kind smile. How he has patience for them, Dream has no idea.

"I'll have to let you know the next time we're free," the lady with *far* too much perfume on expresses.

Dream swallows tentatively, his glass coming to rest by his side once more. A tight smile crawls onto his lips, "Great. Well, we've actually got someone we have to speak to."

"Oh, of course," she declares, the others swarmed around her smiling too, "Don't let us keep you."

Dream nods, offering a blank, "Thank you for coming," and then he's wrapping an arm around George's waist and tugging him away. He thinks he hears a faint, "*Congratulations*," though he pays no mind to it. They start toward nowhere, just happy to be rid of the group. When they're out of earshot Dream leans into George's side, murmuring, "We're not going to see them again, right?"

"I've already forgotten their names," George mutters in response.

Dream chuckles, heart full, and he discards his glass on a stray table in passing, "Did I ever tell you how glad I am that you were the one forced to marry me?"

"Is that so?" George amuses.

"Oh, yeah," Dream draws on, "Seeing you walk down that aisle was a treat in itself."

George sends a glance in Dream's direction, eyes nearly disapproving as a small smile touches his lips. Dream's eagerly awaiting an answer because flustering George is always fun, but he's stopped short as they're stopped in their path by a beaming and fervent woman.

She folds her fingers together, raven eyes flickering between the two of them, "It's time to cut the cake."

Dream's gaze sets on George, who, with light eyes and glowing skin, nods. "We'll be right there, Mum," he says.

She sends them a final grin before she's scurrying away. Dream's hand leaves George's side to slide into his palm, their fingers lacing together naturally. "Awfully traditional wedding," he notes.

"What did you expect," George hums. His feet start again, tugging Dream toward the table people

have begun to gather around.

The cake is lavish, to say the least. Dream really can't believe *this* much opulence is necessary, with seven layers and gilt details against pearl frosting, cream petals the shade of cherry blossoms. It towers over everyone in the room.

Dream dips down from where he stands behind George, lips hovering beside the boy's ear. "Who the *fuck* is gonna eat all that," he murmurs.

George giggles, the melody sending Dream's heart fluttering. His own smile turns the apples of his cheeks sore, and he leaves a kiss on George's glowing face before he's pulling away again, hands finding the boy's waist in accommodation.

They're presented with a knife shiny enough to be a mirror, and George takes it gracefully. His delicate fingers curl around the silver kindly and are soon entrapped by Dream's ridiculously large hand. And when they reach forward to let the serrated edge slice through fluffy frosting and yellow cake, all eyes on them, Dream finds George's ear once more to whisper, "This is fucking stupid." Which earns him another heart-stopping laugh.

When they're granted a slice each atop chinaware, they settle side by side at their table. Dream falls akin to a sappy lover as he enjoys George's company, watching the boy with honeyed eyes and listening to his words with a doting smile. George's stature has been softened by the occasion, pure content fluttering his lashes and brushing his cheeks rosy.

Dream has only half-finished his cake when he's declaring, "Let's go."

George meets his gaze with curious eyes, "Where are we going?"

"The area outside the venue is quite nice," Dream hums.

"We can't leave our own wedding."

"Come on," Dream prods, leaning his head toward George and batting his eyelashes, "Would it really be *our* wedding if we didn't leave halfway through?"

George smiles amusedly, "What do you want to do, exactly?"

"I want to talk to you."

"You can talk to me here."

Dream eyes him for a moment, gaze trailing dazedly over George's face. He leans forward again, George's breath catching when their lips brush. Dream simply grins at the reaction and is purposeful in abandoning George's lips without another touch, instead drifting toward the side of his face. The tip of his nose grazes George's cheekbone until he's lingering by the boy's ear again.

"I want you all to myself," he offers lowly.

George exhales unsteadily, "Stop doing that."

Dream smiles, "Doing what?"

"You know," he murmurs, "You do it on purpose."

Dream hums, turning slightly to watch George's eyelashes flutter. "I like affecting you," he admits.

"It's embarrassing," George breathes.

Dream pauses as giddy ivy curls through his insides at the sight of George and his artfully sculpted face. "You do the same to me," Dream says.

"I don't do that."

"You do it without trying," Dream answers before he's pulling away, sitting back in his chair with mellow features. His arm hooks over the back of his chair and he blinks languidly at George, "I don't even want to think about what you could do to me if you were."

George watches him thoughtfully, breath evening out at the newly gained space. Dream arches a brow.

"Can we go," he purrs, "George?"

George swallows, gaze caramel and dipping into the angles of Dream's face. He nods slowly and receives a grin in response.

"We won't be long," Dream rations, fingers pressing into George's palm and pulling them both from the table, "I promise."

They leave their half-touched slices atop pearlescent dishes and abandoned amongst a swirling room. They drift toward the door and welcome isolation hand in hand. Dream used to find this part sad, when he would leave parties for the preference of basking in a wasteland. Those were the times he felt loneliest. And he was ashamed of the way it wore at him, of how vulnerable he felt in desolation. Now, these have become his favorite moments.

With a friend, vulnerability feels freeing. With someone by his side, someone like George, he craves it. He's happy to have someone to share the spots he finds with, and in the same way, someone to show to the night sky. Because Dream's sure even the prettiest of constellations would find George mesmerizing. He'll have to thank George, one day, for gifting him something as simple as company.

The landscape outside the venue wraps them in hues of azure and emerald. Hills tumble far past them and toward the horizon, blades of grass catching moonlight. A small stream ahead of them severs the field, crystal water leaping over rocks. The whole scene is warped by the steadily climbing night.

George entangles their fingers, his other hand coming up to hold the crook of Dream's elbow gently. "You were right, it is pretty."

Dream turns to send him an approving smile and ends up winded by the look George gives him. His skin holds wild luminescence, matching the sparkle and fragrance of seafoam. His eyes burn just as bright, amber stark against the dark the envelops them. His gaze turns Dream's heartbeats sporadic though he can't put a name to the look, but it's something like astonishment. A glass lip is tucked between teeth and forever holding something back.

"What?" Dream breathes.

The lip slips from its ivory grasp as it breaks out into a smile, one that reaches the apples of George's cheeks, reveals dimples so perfectly carved they might as well belong to an ancient Greek sculpture, and spreads so wide it parts the seam of his lips. Dream's winded a second time.

George presses the smile into Dream's shoulder which Dream thinks is an outright fucking crime.

"Nothing," he murmurs into the fabric. Ebon catches his lie and George keeps his secrets.

"What're you thinking?" Dream pries further, the chambers of his lungs nearly emptied.

George squeezes his hand and his eyes wilt shut for a moment. He shakes his head, "I'll save it."

"You'll *save* it?"

George hums.

Dream pauses and George's eyes flick back up to him. Broken glass from long ago has turned to diamond. "Well, now I *really* want to know," Dream says.

"You will," George answers easily.

Dream pouts in hopes that it'll push George to pour his admission, but the boy merely starts toward the creek and pulls Dream after him.

They reach a bridge, one that stretches out over reflective water. The stream mirrors the stars, catching all their beauty in a melted display. Ripples occasionally break it but the image always returns once the water is smoothed out. Dream releases George's hand as the boy wanders toward the edge to watch the spectacle.

He presses his palms to the railing and leans over the edge, smile gentle and eyes lit by beautiful innocence. Dream strays toward the other side of the bridge to lean against it. He curls his hands over the railing, too, but while George watches carefree water under the influence of night Dream watches George. George, absolutely enthralled by the simplicity of nature and watching it with all the reverence of a masterpiece.

Dream lets him walk along the length of the bridge, fingertips tracing wood, in complete silence. George's eyes follow beauty and discover it in the little things. And even when he turns around, finds Dream observing his shallow movements and deep concentration, his eyes still hold the same look as they did toward the surrounding world.

"I picked this venue, you know," he says, breaking the quiet.

Dream glances briefly at the area, "Really? I don't remember it."

George takes small steps forward, retracing his path toward Dream, "It's not one we visited. I didn't visit it, either, before I picked it."

A frown brushes Dream's features. "Then how did you pick it?"

"I'd seen maybe a few pictures before I knew I wanted this one," George answers softly, "It had looked beautiful in them. But I didn't want to see it in person until tonight."

Dream hums, "And how come?" he asks.

"Don't you think everything feels more beautiful, when you've got someone?" George inquires. Dream says nothing, frown deepening into confusion, and George faintly smiles at his silence. "I wanted to see it for the first time with you."

George comes to a stop in front of Dream. The hushed lapping of water fills the void in conversation as Dream stumbles over thoughts.

"When'd you pick out the venue?" he says finally, lungs labored.

George's smile grows more prominent, eyes glittering. "It was a bit after that party your family hosted, the first one I let you drag me away from."

Dream searches George's face wildly. "Have you—" he swallows, heartbeat loud enough to make his head pound, "Have you known that long?"

George exhales gently, "No. I didn't let myself go that far for a long time."

"Then—then why..."

George grins, gaze cast to the floor when he admits, "I knew you were someone special. Someone I wanted around for a while. Someone I wanted moments like this, with," his eyes raise again and George vaguely shakes his head, "At the time I didn't know how far that extended."

Dream stares, breath stolen. He thinks the skies may cave in on them, thinks this all might be a dream.

"At the party, you had taken me somewhere beautiful to you. I wanted to do the same in return. I didn't want to visit beforehand, because, well..." George folds his lips together timidly, "Things are different when I'm seeing them with you."

Dream's words catch in his throat, none of them good enough. He's already dizzy as it is, but when George reaches up, cups a hand around Dream's jaw and another around his neck, the world spins. George lifts onto his tippy-toes, lips finding Dream's ear. Dream's frozen to the spot, just waiting for something to send him over the edge, for however George will break him. And he'll take it gladly.

George's words blaze, torch Dream's skin and send his head swirling.

"I love you," he whispers, the rhapsody pleasantly bruising and Dream thinks his knees might give out.

When George continues on, he's sure they will.

"You've saved me," he kindly murmurs, "When I didn't know I needed saving. And I don't know how I'll ever repay you. But I hope loving you is enough."

Dream exhales a shaky breath as George pulls away, an echo of his words carved into Dream's skull. He finds the boy's eyes, dumbfounded, and his own widened. He merely feels the dig of wood into his palms as he sinks further.

The boy before him is real. Tragic undertones, sweet new beginnings, love-drunken soul and all. And Dream remembers where he was only months ago, a mere phantom Dream dared to claim Pinocchio. Someone Dream had loathed at the simple thought of. Someone who, now, Dream can't imagine not loving. It's funny, really, the way he stumbled blindly toward the feeling. He got lost somewhere between love and hate, and fell toward the left.

They'd traveled far in so little time, Dream supposes that's what love will do to you. And George had, in some way, saved Dream too. From desperate solitude and wasted adolescence. Because Dream is sure that he and George will spend these years side by side, exploring every corner of the earth, and making up for lost time. Dream will memorize the feeling of starlight rushing through his veins, and the melody of their favorite song, and every inch of George.

They would be the type, the two of them, to leave small parts of them everywhere. They'd be more than the son of a monarch and the son of another. Their little things would eclipse the big ones

because no one would remember the mere title of king and king, though they'd remember where Dream and George marked their humanity. Signed partnership offers with a rejection rather than a signature, skipped parties in favor of visiting their favorite little shop, and raised a prince and a princess who were actually nothing of the sort, who were merely kids.

The realm of royals would be lost to them. Dream would like to tell his younger self all the things he'll get to do just because he met someone special. Even if that version was only months younger, even if that boy had just been told he was to be wed and believed his world was crumbling. He'd tell him that in something so restricting, he'll find more liberty than anywhere else.

And if he ever got the chance, he's sure George would be right there with him.

An unsteady hand finds its favorite waist, Dream's eyes met with certainty. His other finds George's jaw, pulling the boy's face close again and up to Dream's. Foreheads press together and noses brush, though lips never meet.

Dream's eyes fall to George's lips, the spot where the words fell and burst the lights in his mind so that now his ears merely ring. "You can't do that. I think I nearly flatlined," he whispers.

George giggles and it brushes Dream's lips with color so vividly, the sound even sweeter when it's like this. "That was me trying," he answers.

Dream takes a sharp inhale, simply shaking his head because he's forgotten words entirely. His mind is a hazy puddle of thoughts.

Graceful fingers curl around Dream's tie and tug him that much nearer, closing the gap. And Dream's eyes fall shut as he falls into the pleasant motion of George's mouth.

George is precise in the way he makes Dream melt. His touch is barely there at first, only a lingering lock of their lips, too fragile to really have any substance though it makes Dream dizzy nonetheless. Then his fingertips dance against the skin of Dream's neck, featherlight, luring him closer as the crush of their lips grow deeper. And when his other hand finds the one on his waist, guides it up to his heart and George confesses, "I'm yours," against honey-licked lips, it drives Dream crazy.

His eyes flutter open, quiet, sugary fire rushing through him. George's hand stays over his, phantom fingers caressing skin and *sure*. Dream feels the melody of George's heartbeat beneath the pads of his fingers and he's sure, too. His voice swims with it.

"We'll make this happily ever after. I promise."

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